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Femme Finale

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The first day of the rest of my life

On a Saturday afternoon in 1958 my friend Bobbi Prebis took me to The Chesterfield, a cramped, dark bar on Eagle Street in a neighborhood of small factories and storage buildings east of Buffalo's Main Street. I was 17 years old. A young patron, slicked back hair and tattoos running up both arms with a white T-shirt with a cigarette pack rolled into the sleeve, sat at the bar. This image of "Rebel Without a Cause" was enthralling. I asked Bobbi who he was.

He was a she and her name was Diane.

Suddenly, a new world of possibilities opened up for me.

I danced and drank beer. Gay life swirled around me and carried me in and out of fascination. Women, many of whom looked like Diane, protected me in the bars and on the streets and made sure no one took advantage of this newcomer. I was delighted at the concern and care I received at the hands of these rough looking butches. I was also surprised since I didn't consider myself a lesbian. Nor did they.

In short order I grew to like so many of the people I met at the bars. I learned all the current dances, the bop, the stroll, the twist and the mashed potato. I fast danced, mostly with the gay boys to Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly and Little Richard, while I slow danced with the gay girls to Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, and Perry Como and of course more Elvis.

The gay bars were loud and lively; perfect places to hide from and forget the problems of the outside world. This was not a time of activism or political awareness. Most lesbians and gay men were too busy trying to earn a living and keep their identity a secret outside of the bars. They lived in Buffalo, New York, the town in which their parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles lived. For most, being truly out was not an option.

The ability to participate in the same world as family and friends with secret, intimate lives carefully hidden was the norm. Most knew that leading a double life was the way to survive. Only on weekends in dark taverns in the worst parts of town were they able to laugh fully, flirt recklessly and fall in love. The great danger was that someone would "drop a dime" and call your parents or your workplace out of spite or jealousy and divulge your sexuality.

These were precarious but heady times. Most women in the bars were young and only when some old fags or dykes came in for a drink did younger gays consider tomorrow. It was accepted that "nobody loves you when you're old and gay." From this youthful perspective the future was cause for anxiety so it was best to ignore it.

Things were was so different from today where young gays and lesbians are surrounded by gay icons and gay ads and gay characters in movies and on television. I see the new, young gays and lesbians walking on the streets of Allentown and the Elmwood strip. Girls and boys with shiny faces and an easy gait walk in couples and laugh out loud. They are not afraid even though they acknowledge there may be danger.

To me they are children. They are 40 and 50 years younger than I and their time, this time, is referred to as AfterEllen and AfterElton.

In March of 2010, I was part of a panel at the Center for Gay & Lesbian Studies of the City University of New York on "Lesbian Spaces in the 70s". Most in the audience were students who came to hear us older lesbians talk about a time before they were born. They were polite and deferential, fresh and excited, clear-eyed and curious—the young woman I had been 50 years ago.

Maybe young lesbians across the country know about the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village in 1969 because they are celebrated every June. But I would be surprised if they knew about Buffalo GLBT history—even if they were in college in Buffalo now. They might take a course in Gender Studies but colleges here don't teach gay or lesbian history anymore. Those materials have been incorporated into courses offering a broad history of sex and sexuality. Their only exposure to Buffalo lesbian history might be an excerpt from the book Boots of Leather that Liz Kennedy and I published in 1993. Perhaps they might think of that period as the old days, a dangerous time that is just a part of history.

But the dangerous days are not over. On New Year's Eve, 2009 there was a vicious homophobic assault in Buffalo. A young woman coming out of Roxy's, a well know lesbian bar, was knifed in the eye. The gay community rose up. Four hundred people came to an anti-violence rally. Community leaders and politicians made speeches. Another rally that drew 300 included the mayor, a police chief and elders of the gay community. The outcry produced results. The city is increasing lighting in the area and beefing up patrols. The woman with the knife was caught. The victim is healing. Lesbians know their voices made a difference.

If I were a young lesbian today I would take for granted that I could view others like myself on Logo, HBO, public TV and even soap operas. There are thousands of gay and lesbian websites, blogs, dating sites and online newsletters. There are out artists and movie stars, music groups and singers, stage actors and CEOs, sports figures and scientists and politicians at every level of government. Candidates for public office come to Stonewall Democrats meetings for endorsements. The mayor of Houston, Texas is a lesbian and nobody has collapsed because of it.

We discuss marriage, real marriage. Not a fake ceremony in a gay bar with the bartender officiating, an excuse to drink shots and eat cake. We can legally marry in five states and Canada, and New York State recognizes those marriages. If I were young I would work so that the rest of the country would wake up and follow suit.

If I were a young lesbian I would be circumspect but not paranoid. I would go to a church or synagogue that accepted me. I would only rent an apartment if I didn't have to be afraid to be known. I would only take a job where everyone would be respected and even if I needed the money I would work menial jobs until I could find the right one. I would be boyish on Tuesday and girlish on Wednesday and nobody would care because intersex style is all the rage. I would assume acceptance until I experienced rejection.

My circle of friends would not only include other lesbians but young gay and straight

men and straight women as well. We would find each others' relationships natural. We would know people who might feel that a sex change is important and would neither dispute nor disparage it. We would know that sex and gender can be fluid and it is simply the way things are.

But I am not a young lesbian. I am old. I now watch from a distance as new, young lesbians walk arm in arm into a better future that I have had a small part in creating. I am their grandmother and their history is my life.

My name is Madeline Davis and this is my story, the memoir of a femme dyke, S/M player, Wiccan priestess, singer, songwriter, actress, poet, archivist, teacher, gay activist and community elder; a retired Jewish librarian living with her wife in a working class community on the edge of America's rustbelt in Buffalo, New York.

2
My Parents' Stories

I was born in 1940, the first of three children of a working class Jewish family. We lived on Butler Avenue on Buffalo's near East Side, a Jewish neighborhood off Humboldt Parkway, part of the Olmsted Park system that was laid out in the late 1800s. My family resided at 206, the second house on the block, in the lower flat. My grandmother, Rose Morris, had bought the house during the Depression and it was in this home that my mother grew to adulthood.

Most Jewish families I knew were middle class. My father, Joe Davis, however, worked on an assembly line at the Ford Motor Company's plant in Lackawanna, a town just west of Buffalo and the home of Bethlehem Steel. He was kind and sweet and handsome, a quiet man who worked in a factory and had few aspirations beyond a secure job and a loving home.

My mother Harriet, a smart, assertive woman, went to nursing school after high school and left after a year to marry—at least this is what I had always believed. However, looking more closely at family stories as I started writing my memoir, I realized this one didn't quite add up. My mother married my father at 23; if she had married him a year out of high school she would have been a 19 year old bride.

Since my mother passed away some years ago, I decided to ask her cousins Millie and Dorothy to clear up the contradiction.

Millie and Dorothy agreed that Harriet had enrolled at Millard Fillmore Hospital's Nursing School immediately after high school. She apparently attended for only a short time—they don't recall why she left. My mother then worked at a women's sportswear store on Main Street. It was called the Joy Shop and was located directly across the street from a shoe store where Joe Davis, my father, worked. Harriet was quite taken with Joe, her best friend Ella's brother. Cousin Dorothy said my mother would take every opportunity to stand outside the Joy Shop watching the door of the shoe store, hoping he would appear, even for a moment.

After Joe left to work for Ford, Harriet took a higher-paying job at a clothing shop for larger women further up the street. According to Dorothy, my mother landed the new job because she had experience and was a "big woman" herself. My mother had been overweight most of her life. For her high school graduation, my grandmother made her a peach colored dress in size 22. Dorothy said Harriet was not very popular with boys because of her weight.

Harriet Morris remained staunchly committed to her pursuit of Joe Davis even though he never gave her a second look. Both Millie and Dorothy agreed; my mother was obsessed.

While Harriet pursued Joe, he dated mostly non-Jewish girls. One was a pretty redhead named Ivy—a girl my mother called a shiksa. It meant non-Jewish woman and it was not complimentary. I always imagined Ivy looking like Rita Hayworth. For years girls like Ivy were the focus of my father's social life. He paid scant attention to the big Jewish girl hanging around the house with his sister.

My mother would visit Ella often, making sure she was sitting on her friend's living room

sofa when Joey came home from Ford. From old photos it appears my mother whittled her weight down so my father would notice. She never became really thin but pictures show her a more acceptable size, probably about a 14 or 16.

Finally, my father spoke directly to my mother. She was 23; He was 27.

This is the story my mother told me: My father came home one day when she was visiting Ella. He walked into the living room and sat down on the sofa beside her.

He said, "How would you like to get married?"

She answered, "I don't mind."

A few days later, without ever dating, they eloped. On the third of July in 1938, they got into Joe's younger sister Rose and her husband Harry's car. Harry drove west, heading for Cleveland or possibly even Chicago. But Harry lost his way and after hours of driving, they wound up back at the Buffalo stockyards. Frustrated, Harry drove home, gave Joe the keys and said, "Go. Get married."

Joe and Harriet set off again, driving west. By about ten p.m. they arrived in Sheridan, New York, a little town near the shore of Lake Erie. They woke the Justice of the Peace and his wife and were married an hour before midnight. One more hour and they would not have been able to marry because of the legal holiday—my mother always relished telling this part of the story. My parents stayed in a motel in Silver Creek and the next day returned to Buffalo.

As mother entered the house she heard Grandma in the basement doing laundry. She quietly descended the stairs. She told her mother that she had gotten married. Grandma asked, "To who?" Mother said "Joe Davis." Grandma stopped folding and announced, "You're not going to spend one more night with that man until you've had a Jewish wedding." The Rabbi married them a week later. My mother showed me the long turquoise lace dress she wore for her Jewish wedding. The Rabbi said she shouldn't wear white for obvious reasons.

Two years later, I was born after what my mother often described as 14 hours of grueling, horrific labor. Harriet—I never called her anything but mommy—also recalled proudly that I was born with a head full of black curls. The nurses put red ribbons in my hair and when visitors came to the nursery to see the newborns they asked why an older child was in the bassinette.

I was her perfect child, evidence of her great love and tenacity.

When I was in my twenties, my mother drove with me past the nursing students' dormitory building at Millard Fillmore Hospital on Gates Circle and pointed out the window of her room. She told me about the day a friend helped her dye her hair red and how she had to hang her head out the window so she wouldn't drip color in the room while the dye was developing. I didn't think to ask if she dyed her hair red because of Ivy. I also never asked why she quit school, but once she said quietly that she wished she had finished the program.

As a child I was aware of my mother's nursing school career through her medical books. She had anatomy books and books on diseases and from the time I was six I pored over the heavy volumes. At that age I sometimes misinterpreted the information. Leprosy was my favorite disease because I thought the victim grew spotted fur and then his nose fell off.

I learned about bones and muscles and blood. I learned about seeing and hearing and sex. Vaginas and penises were body parts just like eyes, ears, kidneys and the heart. It was all anatomy to me. I also learned that in some families you didn't talk about certain body parts. I didn't understand why people got all huffy about it. It was how the body worked. Still, they preferred their children believe in storks and cabbage leaves and spoke to my mother about it. I thought these people were stupid; my mother was embarrassed.

I like to think of my childhood as happy. When my mother cooked I learned what went into the pot and got to stir the bowl and lick off the spoon. She read me storybooks; I still have some of them.

I remember the floor of our playroom with its pink and blue linoleum that was blocked off in big squares printed with checkerboards and stories and games like tic tac toe. There was a block that had Jack and Jill and one with Bah Bah Black Sheep. My sister Sheila, three years younger, would play on that linoleum with me for hours. Both of our parents supported curiosity. They bought us books on science, geography, poetry, world affairs and more. They taught us to love learning.

We listened to 78 rpm recordings of The Little Engine That Could and Tubby the Tuba. Mother had a beautiful singing voice and daddy would listen to the Emperor Concerto and performances by the Archduke Trio. He loved Beethoven.

My father played with me but it seemed whenever we played for too long mother came to oversee. He once looked up at her and said, "She's your child. You won't let her belong to anybody else." Maybe that's why I especially loved it when my father was outside working on the car. I got to hold his tools, uninterrupted.

To hear my mother tell it, her love for my father was the great romance of the ages. She would say that she would simply look at her Joey and her heart would pound. He was the center of her world. It had to have been crushing for her when she learned my father had had an affair.

I was 17 when my father cheated. He was a union steward and had been at a seminar in Fredonia for a weekend. I have a photo of him at a blackboard teaching workplace procedures to other union members. His paramour was a blond woman who lived on our street and worked in the office at the factory. My mother told me Daddy came home with lipstick on his underwear. She didn't speak to him for a month. It was tense around the house and silent at dinner. I wasn't told what had happened until after she had forgiven him and things went back to as normal as they could under the circumstances.

I never spoke with my father about it. My brother Mark, seven years old at the time, was not aware of what was going on. My sister Sheila knew but still won't talk about it.

I don't think I was mad at my father. I remember I was sad that he had hurt my mother. Back then I believed all men did such things. That's how men were. I don't know where I got those ideas. I have a suspicion my grandmother may have said that to me. Rose was never particularly trusting of men. She thought they were unpredictable.

As a result of the affair, my father's halo was tarnished but not gone. He was still the

man I loved most.

My father died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 52. It was September, 1963 and I was 23. I lived in my own apartment by then, but my sister Sheila and brother Mark were at home and watched every day as he became thinner and had to take more and more medicine for the pain.

The night he died I was performing at a coffee house on Tupper Street called La Critique. In the middle of a set, our family friend Bob McCarthy ran in. He said, "Your dad is dying. You'd better come with me." I packed up hastily and got into his Volkswagen Bug. He drove me to my parents' house. I was about ten minutes too late. My father had already died.

My sister and I went up to the room where he was lying. It used to be our bedroom and had twin beds in it. He was grey and thin from the cancer. We sat down on two chairs. We didn't cry. We talked about how wonderful our father was and how we'd miss him. We talked about mom and Mark and how hard this was going to be. Then Aunt Kate, a big, white-haired regal woman who was a nurse, burst in. She told us we couldn't sit in a room with a dead person. We had to go downstairs. We were angry but we left.

Relatives and friends came to our home while we were sitting shiva (mourning) and tried to comfort my mother but she was inconsolable. She didn't want anyone to touch her. At some point, with tears running down her face she turned to my eleven-year-old brother Mark and said, "Why did Joey have to die? Why couldn't it have been you?"

My sister's recollection is that this remark was made much later but this is how I remember it.

My father was buried in the Temple Beth Zion section of Buffalo's Forest Lawn Cemetery. My mother was annoyed that during the funeral dad's sister Ella started screaming "Joey, Joey" and tried to throw herself on top of the coffin as it was lowered. They had to grab Aunt Ella's arms and pull her away from the grave. Mother was angry that Ella had made herself the center of attention. After all, Ella was only the sister and Harriet was the widow.

Mother was 45 when my father died. She never dated again. She was asked out and the local shodkin (matchmaker) tried to get her to date Jewish men but she refused. Her life was wrapped up in my father and subsequently with mourning him. Mourning took over her life and progressively she became more angry and abusive, especially to my brother Mark.

My mother died of heart failure at 86 years of age. To the very end, she viewed her love for my father as a great romance none could equal. It was an all-consuming adoration. Perhaps it was also a pervasive illness.

When I was still having relationships with men, I chose those that most reminded me of my father: working class, worked with their hands, loved music and sex and laughed easily. Men who were attractive to and vulnerable to other women. Then there's that thing about the smell of motor oil; the smell of the factory. Like an aphrodisiac.

When I started coming out, I was attracted to working class butchy women with that same demeanor. Many of them cheated on me. It was a pattern for a long time.

I used to visit my father's grave. I would talk to him. I told him when I was going to marry Allen. I don't think I really believed that he could hear me but, just in case… When I left the cemetery I would leave a pebble on his tombstone.

I stopped going to the cemetery after my mother was buried beside my father. It's hard to say exactly why. Perhaps I was too angry with the woman she had become. Perhaps it was because he was no longer alone. Or maybe I simply knew my mother never wanted anyone to come between her and her Joey.

3

I lose my virginity. I keep my naïveté.

When I was 17, I decided I wanted to lose my virginity to a man I had met who was 20 years my senior. I was introduced to Bill's world of free thinkers and free lovers my senior year of high school by my friend Naomi who was a year older than I. She invited me to her house and showed me Beat poetry. We drank Chilean wine with strawberries. We shared a fascination with modern writing and one weekend she took me to one of her Beatnik haunts, the Paralume Gallery and Coffee House on Elmwood Avenue near West Utica.

The doorway was two steps down and opened onto a small space that had been a storefront. A little counter at the back held a lovely old espresso machine. It was silver with brass handles and spigot. There was a small sink and a little stove to heat water for tea and milk for café au lait, cappuccino and other specialty drinks. I was enchanted by the smells, the art on the walls, the tables covered with checkered cloths and candles in Chianti bottles. I drank Constant Comment Orange and Spice tea and felt very sophisticated.

Every Friday and Saturday evening Jerry Raven played guitar and sang folk songs in a wonderful liquid tenor voice. I had met Jerry many years before at the Ferry Schul on East Ferry Street. He was in the Boy Scout Troop that met in the room next to my Girl Scout Troop. But this was a different setting, and he was a different person. I was thrilled with Jerry the folk singer. I wanted to be him. I wanted to play and sing and get the attention that came with talent and stage presence. But I was much too shy to do more than fantasize.

Within this dreamy atmosphere was the clientele. Sylva, a woman in her 70s lived upstairs and was the arbiter of art and quality. Guy, a tiny man with a snide sense of humor played classical guitar and had a six foot tall stunning mulatto model girlfriend. There was Phyllis who was wild, and had had a few marriages. There was Bobbi, little and boyish, the first lesbian I ever met. And there was Bill, 38 years old, an artist and a poet. Black hair and blue eyes, I thought he was gorgeous and brilliant. He said I was smart and articulate. I laughed at his jokes.

I went back to the Paralume night after night, enthralled by what I was learning about art and theater, literature and people. I read at one of the poetry evenings and the regulars thought I had potential. It was quite a compliment from such an aggregation of sophisticates. Bill took me under his literary wing and gave me criticism and encouragement. And every day I became more and more disposed to give him whatever he wanted. Still, he didn't seem to want much.

In June of 1958, about a week before my 18th birthday I went to Bill's apartment. I had been there before, but never alone. I told him I had a request.

I said, "I've chosen you to be the first."

He asked, "First what?"

I answered, "I want you to be my first lover."

He laughed and asked if I was really a virgin. He was flattered that I wanted my first

sexual experience to be with him but said I should think it over and come back in a year if I felt the same. I left. Then I called my close friends.

I told them that I had picked the first man I would sleep with. They were so excited and wanted to know all about him. I think they were really impressed—a Beatnik, a poet, an artist—but they did think he was way too old.

Throughout the following year I continued to hang around the coffee house. I became a regular. I read my poetry from the bar stool stage and was pronounced talented. The Paralume became home. I also spent occasional evenings at gay bars.

On June 29, 1959, I showed up at Bill's apartment. I told him it had been a year. He didn't know what I meant.

I reminded him, and pronounced, "Here I am."

He stared. "You're kidding. You haven't slept with anyone during this whole year?"

I was surprised at how nervous he was. He was a cool guy. He had been married three times. What was the big deal? I mean it was a big deal for me because I had been preparing for more than a year for this "event" but it seemed strange that he was somewhat at a loss. But, he wasn't so much at a loss that he would say no. We moved to his sofa and I had the most wonderful time losing my virginity.

Afterwards he said to me, "You've done this before. I know it."

I said no, this was really my first time and could we do it again. He laughed and we did it again. It was great. I was crazy about him.

Although the evening went extremely well, and I was overjoyed to finally enter the world of the experienced, after a few days I wondered why I had not received a phone call. Perhaps it was not as exciting for Bill as it had been for me. I worried and paced and asked my girlfriends for advice: call, don't call, wait, don't wait. I finally got up the nerve to call.

Bill was pleasant. How was I doing? Was I writing? Did I see a recent art show? What was that about? I gave up the only virginity I'd ever have and he was asking about art shows?

Then he said, "By the way, I'm engaged."

He and Deena were getting married at the end of the summer. I was horrified. Deena was a slim, blonde woman in her 30s who wore tight sweaters and high heels. She surely was not his type, was she? Well, I guess she was.

I didn't think he would want to marry me, but at least a few months together would have been nice. But, he had made no commitment so, always fair and understanding—or perhaps simply retaining my pride—I wished him well and got off the phone as fast as I could.

I called my friend Sandy who had told me she wanted to spend the summer in New York City and inside of twenty minutes we had checked with our parents and bought train tickets to New York. I'd show Bill. I would go and do something really exciting. And then I cried.

Two weeks later, Sandy and I checked into the YMHA on Lexington Avenue on the Upper East Side. We shared a three-person room with a young woman named Sara who was very small, dark and shy and had a huge crop of straight, black pubic hair. For me it was her

most outstanding attribute. To this day I cannot recall her face at all, only her crotch.

I obtained a job at Shoecraft, a shoe store on Fifth Avenue that catered to larger sizes. The two other salesgirls were over six feet and stunning, and both wanted to be models. I had a grand time walking the fashionable streets of Manhattan, spending my lunch hours at Rizzoli, the art book publishing house outlet, or sitting on benches watching dressed up New Yorkers.

Back at the Y, Sandy and I began to hang around the recreation room with other young people. Jack was from Queens. He was charming, cute and funny. I was vulnerable, disappointed and needy. A perfect match. On weekends we would go to his fifth floor walk-up one room apartment, make love and eat Chinese. It took the edge off an increasingly irritating job. Women with big feet are annoying.

Sandy became involved with an Israeli boy, named Yaakov, a graduate student at Boston University. He flirted with me but I thought that was just how Israeli boys were. Around midsummer I became ill with a cold and by the end of August I had a nasty cough and fever. It was time to go home. Yaakov offered to drive us back to Buffalo. We were so grateful. We packed our bags. I left a note for Jack and we took off.

Yaakov drove slowly saying he wanted to see the sights. After all, he'd never seen New York State. I slept in the back, getting out only to pee, drink juice and take more aspirin. That evening we stopped in Geneva and rented a two-bedroom cabin by the lake. I don't remember eating but I recall putting on a long shirt and climbing into a lumpy but clean bed, feeling dizzy and feverish and ready to sleep.

In the middle of the night I awoke to Yaakov settling on the edge of my bed and pulling back the covers. I started to protest but he held his hand over my mouth. He said, "You don't want to wake your girlfriend do you? I'll tell her you invited me and she'll be really mad. I'm not going to hurt you." And he pulled up my shirt and lay down on top of me. He didn't hurt me, physically. I can hardly remember the act itself. I was weak and clearly had a temperature. There was no energy to fight. And I didn't want to upset Sandy, or jeopardize our ride home. I cried soundlessly. Yaakov tiptoed back to Sandy's room.

The next morning we drove on to Buffalo. Sandy chattered about her plans to write to Yaakov and visit Boston. I was silent, sometimes pretending, sometimes actually sleeping.

Yaakov helped bring my suitcase into the house and shook hands with my parents. He also said to my mother, "She's a wild one. I'd keep an eye on her." After he left, mother told me what he had said. I never told her what had happened. I showered and climbed into bed.

The next day the doctor said I had pleurisy and a 104 degree fever and would be on antibiotics for two weeks. Near the end of my recovery the phone rang. It was Bill. He said he'd heard I was home and sick and how was I doing? I said I was weak but better and how was Deena? They had broken up. Would I like to get together? My heart raced. I was happy and affronted. Did he think he could just walk back into my life? Happy won out and we made a date.

That weekend he picked me up and we went to the beach at the small boat harbor. The

day was warm and soft. Lake Erie was calm and blue. And I was feeling fantastic with Bill by my side. I told him about the Israeli. I said thought I had been raped. I wasn't sure because I thought rape was when you were beaten up and then forced to have sex. Bill said this was absolutely rape. He shook his head and said he wished he could protect me from men like that. But he also said that the world was not a gentle place and I would have to learn to protect myself by learning to be smarter.

We started seeing each other that August of 1959. I was in love and monogamous; he was not, seeing the occasional other woman. After a few months he said that since he was 20 years older, I needed to "expand my horizons" and see other people. I didn't want to. I was in love and it felt like rejection. Was he trying to justify seeing other women? He didn't have to. I never complained. I just accepted that this was the way he was. I also assumed that he loved me and that love meant that he wanted me to belong to him and only sleep with him. I was furious that he wanted me to see other people. I decided to do it and make sure Bill knew it.

I chose his friend Tony, a medical student and actor. Tony was tall and handsome in a British gentry sort of way. We had spent time together at the coffee houses and bars and had flirted. But he knew I was loyal to Bill. When I told Tony what Bill had advised, we slept together and made it a point to tell Bill, together, holding hands. I wanted to hurt Bill. I could tell by his face that I was successful. But, like a good Beatnik, he said it would be healthy for us.

Bill called me after that. We continued to see each other but things had changed. Not that I had stopped loving him, but he was no longer the man I had imagined would be mine for life. We saw each other on and off for about three years. The relationship with Tony lasted on and off for about seven years. I also continued to expand my horizons by sleeping with other men as well, thinking it was the worldly and grownup thing to do.

4

Grandma Rose and the Color Line

My mother, father, sister Sheila and brother Mark and I moved from the East Side of Buffalo to a house in Kenmore, a middle class suburb north of the city line, just before my senior year of high school. For all my life I had lived in the lower flat of my grandmother Rose's house. It was inconceivable to me that this would not always be home. I especially couldn't imagine living in a place without my grandmother Rose.

Rose may have been the most influential person in my life. While parents are in charge of discipline, grandparents are often the good guys, dispensers of treats and understanding. Rose was all of that. She was tall and pinned her silver-streaked dark hair into a chignon. She wore flowered housedresses and full aprons with pockets stuffed with peppermints that she gave out when we were good. She made coffee in a little white cooking pot with a handle. She would dump in the dry coffee, add water, put it on the fire and boil it to death. She allowed it to settle for a few minutes and carefully poured the hot, inky liquid into her cup. No sugar, no milk, just this horrible black fluid that looked and smelled like bad cough medicine.

Rose was a clever seamstress and milliner. She loved detail and the intricacies of working with her hands. She also loved learning and finished eighth grade, a significant accomplishment for a woman from a poor immigrant family at the turn of the last century. But, because the family was large and poor, she went to work at age thirteen. Rose Mittleman got a job working for Manny Morris in his fruit and vegetable stand on the Washington-Chippewa Market. Most days she awoke at 4 a.m. to travel downtown on the streetcar to open the stand. Often she would do extra work like skinning rabbits in ice water so they could be delivered to restaurants. By the time the fruit deliveries arrived at 7 a.m. her fingers were blue.

At 17 Rose married Manny, who was close to 20 years her senior. He gave her a diamond ring, an extraordinary gift for a poor young girl whose parents came from the Pale of Settlement between Russia and Poland. Her father had been a house painter who spoke mostly Yiddish and enough English to negotiate his business dealings.

Manny's family was German Jews who felt Rose was not of the appropriate social class and counseled him to reconsider. But he loved her and married her in spite of their disapproval.

In her twenties Grandma enrolled in night school and learned to make hats out of yards of toilet paper wound around cardboard frames because the school couldn't afford cloth and wire. She was proud that her huge toilet paper picture hat won first prize in the school's fashion show.

I learned how to sew, embroider and knit from my grandmother. When I was a child, she taught me to use the Singer treadle sewing machine that she pulled out from the back hall into the kitchen so I could make potholders and aprons. To this day working with thread and cloth makes me think of her.

Rose was a hard worker and a good businesswoman and, because my grandfather suffered from chronic depression, she ran the business. Rose didn't know about Manny's

depression when she married him. She said it initially took the form of long periods of silence. She simply assumed he was thoughtful. As he grew older, the depression worsened.

I was one and a half years old in the spring of 1942 when my grandfather committed suicide. My mother found him hanging in the attic. I can't remember when they told me about it. There is a photograph of him holding me, surrounded by his sister, my Aunt Sarah, Grandma, my mom, and mom's brother, Uncle Leonard. For me my grandfather was always a smiling stranger in black and white.

Rose said he was a good man but he had problems; he worried a lot. She said he became a Christian Scientist because they had spiritual healers who would come to the house and talk with him for hours. They helped for a while. But in the end, nobody could help.

Grandma didn't talk about the suicide. She'd say it was a long time ago. "It's over. What can you do?" And poured her black coffee from the little white pot.

My mother said her father killed himself because he worried about his son Leonard. It was the winter of 1941 and Leonard was in the Army. Leonard wrote that he was shipping out to Italy. Grandpa became distraught; certain Leonard was going to be killed. He couldn't stand thinking about it. He stopped going to work. He called the healers. They talked and prayed. One day he went up to the attic and threw a piece of clothesline over the rafter. I imagine he then made a loop with a knot, pulled a chair under the rope, stood on the chair, put the rope around his neck and kicked the chair away.

They looked for him for hours—in the basement, in the yard, at the neighbors, at the store. Then my mother went up to the attic. She ran and told Grandma. Mr. Sens from next door came and cut Grandpa down.

All I could think when I first heard the story was that my Uncle Leonard survived the war so Grandpa had killed himself for no reason.

Rose wouldn't talk about the suicide or sadness. I don't know if she ever shared that part of her life with anyone. It was as if it happened; it's over; move on. But Rose did enjoy telling stories. A favorite subject was her customers. One customer who stood out to me was Bessie.

In addition to fruits and vegetables, Rose sold flowers wholesale and one of her regulars was a woman who owned a classy flower shop on Delaware Avenue. Bessie wore masculine skirted suits with a plain cotton man's shirt, a tie and a hat. Grandma knew she was a "woman who liked girls." I asked her what she thought of that. She said it didn't make any difference to her. "To each his own."

I interviewed Rose in 1977. The tape begins with her recipe for tsimmes, a sweetened casserole of carrots, sweet potatoes and prunes she would make on Jewish holidays. I thought that starting with something simple like a recipe would make her relax about being in front of a microphone. I needn't have bothered. She was great. She talked about everyone in the family and had definite opinions about right and wrong. She also talked about the cottage at Crystal Beach, Ontario, a short ride across the Peace Bridge and up the road from the Canadian border.

Grandma bought the cottage called "The Little Wren" at 11 Cherrywood when I was

three years old. We would vacation there every summer. My sister Sheila and I would play with our cousins and neighborhood kids. We walked to the beach, swam and made sand castles. Some evenings, mother would play cards with other ladies on the street. They told me she was a terrible card player. Rose would go on dates with her boyfriend, Mr. Sternberg. We liked him because he brought us presents. He asked her to marry him but Rose said she'd done that once. Grandma sold the cottage when I was sixteen. Those summers were some of my best memories of childhood. I still make the trip across the bridge to look at the cottage. I have occasional fantasies about buying it back. But it looks so little now.

In 1957 when my family moved to Kenmore, they joined the other Jewish families who had been steadily moving north out of our east side neighborhood since the first black families moved in ten years before. I was seven years old when the first black family—we called them colored then—moved onto our block. Lamont and Gwen Mitchell and their daughter Marcia bought the house diagonally across the street. Marcia was four, the same age as my sister Sheila, and they became friends.

As a child I was unaware of racism even though my family used the Yiddish term schvartze—meaning black. I didn't realize it was derogatory. I just thought it meant cleaning lady.

After the Mitchell family moved in, another black family, Dr Johnson, his wife Evelyn, who worked at the Welfare Department, their daughter Sinette and son, Sammy moved into the house on the corner. Sinette and I were the same age, eight years old, and we became close. Sinette's family liked me, but they were different in more ways than race. Sinette's parents had gone to college and were professional people. They decorated their house with newer, more modern furniture. Their dishes were fancier. They were rich.

Sinette and I spent hours up in her playroom where she taught me to dance to a song called "One Mint Julep." We Lindyed and Jitterbugged and laughed through rainy afternoons. Until the birthday party. When Sinette was 12, her parents gave her a party with boys. After cake, they rolled up the living room rug and started playing records. Mrs. Johnson called me into the kitchen and gently said, "Madeline, there's going to be dancing, and I want you to know that if you feel uncomfortable it would be all right if you wanted to go home."

I just stared. Why would I go home? I loved to dance. Mrs. Johnson continued, "Honey, there are boys here and if it feels at all, well, not right to you…" and the sentence hung there.

I realized Mrs. Johnson was reminding me that the other kids were black and I was white. I thanked her and told Sinette I had to be home early. I ran across the street, locked myself in the bathroom and cried. I finally understood that being different mattered.

By 1957 we were one of the few white families in the neighborhood. This was when my parents said we were moving. My great aunts, my grandfather's sisters, gave them the money to buy the house in Kenmore. They could never have afforded it themselves.

Grandma didn't want to leave so she rented the downstairs to a black woman named Mamie who often had male company that would arrive in fancy cars. Eventually the neighbors

told Grandma that Mamie was a madam who ran a whore house further over on the east side. Grandma told Mamie she was sorry and liked her very much, but she couldn't have those kinds of "goings on" in her house. Mamie seemed to take it very well. Grandma then rented the flat to a black couple. They would buy the house when Grandma died.

Rose stayed in the house on Butler Avenue until she went into The Rosa Coplon Jewish Home in 1987. Mother didn't like visiting the home and only went on rare occasion. She said she was afraid of winding up there; it was smelly and everybody was old. I became my grandmother's primary caretaker and went every week, sometimes more.

My grandmother made friends with nurses, aides and residents. Everyone sought her out. She drew, painted, sang with the weekly entertainers and won a wheelchair bowling trophy. Her photograph made the cover of the Jewish Federation magazine, "L'Dor v'Dor" (From Generation to Generation).

In 1990 my grandmother developed a urinary infection that spread. I visited her in the hospital and she told me she had had a dream. "I saw clouds and a big white gate. And you know what? It was pearly." She laughed.

Rose died at age 95. These were the final words of my eulogy: "What I remember and loved most about my grandmother was also the greatest gift she gave me. It was her ability to laugh. It got her through rough times and it often does the same for me."

I still have Rose with me whenever I sew or embroider—and every time I watch The Young and the Restless. After she broke her hip in 1985 and became housebound, I would phone her almost every day. She started telling me about her soap opera. Wanting to know what she was talking about, I went to my Cousin Joyce's office on my lunch hour. I was working at the downtown library and Joyce worked across the street. We would eat in the kitchen area and watch the soap. Rose and I would have long discussions about the comings and goings of Genoa City. Even when she went into the nursing home I would update her every few days until she died.

It is almost 30 years later and I still watch The Young and The Restless. The characters now have children and grandchildren. If my grandmother were still around, I would tell her that Nikki dyed her hair dark so nobody would notice her facelift. Rose and I would definitely notice the camouflage and together, we would laugh.

5
I Learn I Am Not Crazy

When I was 18, Laughlin's was the center of my Beat world. It was an old bar on the corner of Franklin and Tupper Streets and everybody was there. Dave, the bartender, was a poet. I never read his poems but everyone said he was talented. He had an urban cowboy demeanor—tall, skinny, dark, and mustached. Dave could have been handsome once but he drank a lot and it showed in his face.

The usual anti-establishment bar philosophers would congregate every evening and discuss art, poetry, morality—actually amorality—and politics, welcoming anyone who wanted to join in. It was a place for intellectuals and pseudo intellectuals, Beatniks and Beatnik wannabes. I couldn't tell the difference but I suspect I was the latter.

My friend Bobbi used to hang out there. There and the coffee houses and the gay bars. Bobbi got around. She was usually at Laughlin's with her girlfriend Spike, a blond, slim, exotic looking young woman with black eyeliner and white lipstick. She didn't talk much. Bobbi talked all the time; she was bright and witty. In the summer Bobbi came into the bar in plaid Bermuda shorts, looking like a little boy.

Bobbi was my first contact with someone I knew was a lesbian. Laughlin's was a fairly accepting place for those who were different. Although it was not a gay gathering place, the few gay people found there on any evening seemed to find acceptance in this "alternative" crowd.

In the early days of my "residence" at Laughlin's I was attending the University of Buffalo and still living with my family in Kenmore. I hated Kenmore. Although there were a few Jewish families on the block, it was not a Jewish neighborhood. And I didn't know we were poor until we moved to Kenmore. When we lived on the East Side I thought everyone went through factory layoffs and meals of Creamettes elbow macaroni and canned tomato soup. Kenmore wasn't a rich town, but it was classier than what I was used to.

I would often come home from Laughlin's at three a.m. after a night of singing and drinking with my friends and my mother would wake up and yell, "You've been at that goddamn place again. You smell like a brewery."

Finally in the fall of 1960 I moved out and went to live with Carl.

Carl and I had met in our sophomore year of college. We were both working as student assistants at Lockwood Library at the University. I could hardly believe they were paying me to be in a place I loved so much. Even putting books away in the stacks was fun because it gave me a chance to peruse some of the wonderful old volumes.

Carl had little money and lived in a rundown apartment over a car repair on the corner of 17th and Vermont on Buffalo's West Side. There was no refrigerator so in the winter he put a breadbox on the outside windowsill and kept things cold. After a few months we moved a few doors down, into a rear cottage with his mother where there was a real refrigerator and AA sayings and prayers all over the walls. She was a recovering alcoholic, devoted to the Program.

I would go to Laughlin's with Carl. He envisioned himself a poet and a philosopher so he fit right in. Chubby, insecure me was thrilled to go into the bar with a guy who was smart and good looking. But he was weird. When we would leave he would start a fight with me. He would accuse me of looking at another guy and wanting to sleep with him. He would harangue me until I cried. Then he'd want to have sex.

This happened every time we went to Laughlin's. I suppose it turned him on to browbeat me, and it must have turned me on too because I thought he was a great lover. I finally figured out the browbeating pattern, and from then on, instead of getting upset, I'd fake distress. Carl was satisfied and we'd have sex. I didn't realize I was complicit in aberrant behavior. Perhaps I thought I deserved it.

Carl also completely stunned me in bed one night by announcing that he wanted to have sex with my sister. That was pleasant. He had never, up until that moment, said a thing about desiring Sheila. He just blurted it out, "I think I'd like to have an affair with your sister." As if it was a possibility.

Sheila had absolutely no knowledge of any of this and I know for certain she would have been stunned and then would have laughed in his face. He was simply not her type. I didn't think that, I knew it. It made me feel terrible that he desired my younger sister. At the time, it didn't occur to me that there was something wrong with Carl for even telling me he wanted a 16-year-old high school student. Instead, I was crushed.

It was especially hard hearing his admission because this was a complicated time in my relationship with my sister. Sheila had started to openly disapprove of me. She had always hated being known as "Madeline's little sister". Sheila was pretty, bubbly, thin and assertive. I was quiet, friendly, a little shy because of my size, a good student who had found a niche in English classes and poetry readings. After the move to Kenmore my sister cut me out of her life.

Sheila wanted to be like the popular girls in her new school, wear cashmere sweater sets with her initials at the collar and pledge a good sorority. Unlike her sister who pledged an okay but not great sorority in which many of the girls were "different". Sheila also joined B'Nai B'rith Girls where she found a social life and dated Jewish boys.

Boys. One huge difference between us in high school was that Sheila had boyfriends, real boyfriends who took her to dances and out for a coke. I never dated in either high school or college. I hung around coffee houses and bars with beatniks and guys who would sleep with me but wouldn't take me to a movie.

When Carl told me he wanted to sleep with Sheila, I said, "Are you crazy. Sheila wouldn't even look at you."

Carl was insulted. I couldn't believe it. He was upset that my sister wouldn't want him. The jerk. I got out of bed and sat in the living room and wouldn't talk to him. He came in and tried to soothe my hurt feelings. "You know I wouldn't really. I know it's not possible. You know I love you."

I didn't sleep with Carl for a week but in the end I couldn't leave him; I was too insecure.

Then about a year later he went to work at Buffalo General Hospital, met a nurse, and broke up with me. I moved to a third floor apartment in a big old house on West Utica, and spent a lot more time at Laughlin's.

Other boys from the university went to the bar. Bob, Scott, Ronny and Allen—the boy I would eventually marry—gathered at the round oak tables, sticky with beer. They discussed motorcycles and books and what was wrong with the world. They were sweet boys and I had affairs with a few of them.

Scott and I lived together for a few months. By then I was 23 and working as an inner city Junior High English teacher. Scott was just 18 and brilliant, but irritating as hell. He played classical guitar and when I performed at the coffee houses on weekends he often did guitar sets. He was a beautiful bad boy who drove me crazy staying up all night smoking dope and playing records. I was working and had to get some sleep but my requests for quiet floated past him.

I called my former guidance counselor at the University, hoping for advice. She was out and Dr. Schutkekker, Director of Counseling Services, picked up the phone. He asked what I was doing. I said I was in bed because I hadn't slept. He asked for how long. I told him a couple of days. He told me he was worried and thought I should go to the hospital for evaluation. He said pack a bag and he would pick me up. I have no idea why I just let it happen.

Dr. Schutkekker drove me to Buffalo General Hospital and checked me into West 5, the psych ward. I was told I'd see a doctor the next day since it was late. My friends Bobbi and Dawn as well as my mother and sister came to see me. Nobody understood why I was there. The nurses wouldn't comment.

That night I woke to the sounds of shuffling. I put on slippers and joined a small group of patients walking in a circle in the hallway. I asked one woman why she was there. She said she couldn't sleep because she had had shock treatments and was nervous. I went back to bed.

The next morning I was asked to join a group for exercises. Wes Olmsted, an artist I knew from Laughlin's, led the group. When we saw each other we burst out laughing. The situation was too bizarre to do morning stretches. After the session Wes asked me why I was there. I said I had no idea.

I sat down at the piano in the hallway and began to play. A doctor sat down next to me and we played chopsticks and a couple of other songs. He asked me why I was there. I told him Dr. Schutkekker brought me in because I had been in bed for two days and he was worried. He asked if I thought I was crazy. I said no but I had a boyfriend who was driving me there. He said just get rid of him. I said okay, and he signed the release papers. I went home and told Scott to leave. He did. It was that simple. That night I went to Laughlin's and told everybody about my day in the psych ward. Wes was there and we all shook our heads in amazement that such a thing could happen.

My friend David Lewitzky has written poetry about the bar and has kept up with some of the old timers. Sometimes I'm curious about everyone. Laughlin's had been very important to me; it was where I first felt like a grownup. The bar had been my home and those who gathered

there became my family.

I learned that Dave the bartender died in February of 2010. I hope he left his poems behind. I would like to read them.

6
Fat Girl

I gained weight when I was eight years old after I had my tonsils out. That was when things stopped being lovely.

From the time I was very little until the late 1950s we would go, every Sunday, to my great aunts' house for dinner. My four great aunts, Sarah, Martha, Nettie and Ray Morris—my Grandfather Manny's sisters—lived in a wonderful Victorian house on Woodlawn Avenue. It always smelled of chicken and brisket and lavender soap. It had a living room and a formal parlor, intricate polished woodwork and pocket doors. The aunts loved us and adored my parents. Martha, Nettie and Ray worked at executive jobs. Sarah kept the house and cooked the meals. She made real noodles and hung them on a broom handle stretched across kitchen chairs so they could dry.

One Sunday when I was about 9 years old, we had finished dinner and I went into the living room and put a record on the wind-up Victrola. It was a Strauss waltz. I went into the adjoining parlor and before the full length framed mirror that hung between the front windows I began to dance. The music was beautiful and I loved to dance.

My Aunt Martha, my favorite of the aunts, came to the doorway between the living room and parlor and stood watching me with a smile on her face. Then, shaking her head a bit but still smiling, she said, "The elephant is a graceful bird."

I stopped dancing, went back to the living room and sat down. The waltz kept playing. I would never dance there again.

It was not easy being a fat girl. Every night at dinner my mother reminded me not to take seconds or eat dessert even though she made desserts for the family. Clothes were always a problem. I had to be taken to Adam Meldrum & Anderson's and Hengerer's department stores to shop in the Chubette departments. They didn't have many choices in the 1940s and 1950s, and most clothes, except for pastel cotton blouses, were dark and shapeless. I didn't like shopping. The only good part was going to lunch at the Mayflower Restaurant. I always got a grilled cheese sandwich and French fries and a chocolate milk shake.

I didn't have lots of clothes; chubettes cost more than regular sizes and we didn't have much money. They call it working poor now. My favorite outfit was blue jeans and one of my father's white shirts that would cover up my big belly. With white cotton socks and navy and white saddle shoes I was pretty comfortable.

It was harder to find comfortable school clothes. I had pleated dark plaid and plain navy skirts and orlon sweaters. I did have a short-sleeved pink sweater I liked a lot. Sometimes my pink sweater developed little pills that I spent hours snipping off with a cuticle scissors.

I hated gym class. I couldn't climb ropes or run fast or throw far. But in one class we learned folk dancing and I liked this class because I liked dancing and I was well coordinated. And I didn't have to dance alone. I especially enjoyed a Swiss dance we did with sticks that we

hit on the floor and then hit together as we did something resembling a square dance. I was looking forward to performing the dance for the other students in the auditorium.

When my mother came to pick me up after rehearsal one day the gym teacher asked her to step into her office. The teacher told her that I shouldn't wear my favorite pink sweater anymore because it was too tight and I should be wearing a bra. I was so embarrassed. I had horrible visions of the other kids watching me flop around and laughing behind my back. When I started to wear a bra, the girls in my gym class told me it looked better and they had wondered when I would get one.

Soon after she bought me the bra, my mother took me to Dr. Mary.

Dr. Mary Catalano lived next door to us on Butler Avenue. Her mother, born in Sicily, lived with her. Mrs. Catalano was a little white-haired lady who embroidered altar cloths for St. Francis De Sales Church on the Parkway and at Christmas brought us plates of giugileni and cuccidate cookies. The giugilenis were sweet lumps of shortbread rolled in sesame seeds and the cuccidates were frosted dough stuffed with mashed figs. They are still my favorite cookies.

Dr. Mary delivered my sister, my brother and me. She was our family doctor throughout our childhood and because of her we assumed there were lots of women doctors. In fact, she was one of the very few in Western New York.

I thought Dr. Mary was the most brilliant person in the world. She had a big machine called a fluoroscope that could look at your bones. And a diathermy machine that gave off heat and created static on all the radios in the neighborhood and even made the lights in our house flicker. We always knew when she was doing something medical.

Sometimes when she wasn't working Dr. Mary would let me go into the examining rooms and look at the machines and into the microscopes. She said if I wanted to become a doctor she would pay for medical school for me. I was 12 when she offered.

I was also 12 when my mom bought me a bra and took me to Dr. Mary to lose weight. Dr. Mary weighed me. I think I was over 140 pounds. She gave me little pink heart-shaped pills, an envelope full of Dexedrine tablets. I took one every day. They suppressed my appetite and made me move around and do things very fast—dishes, homework, piano practice. They also made my hands shake and I had a hard time sleeping. I'd wake in the middle of the night and walk around and my mother would get up and make me go back to bed. I'd lay with my eyes open until morning.

I took the Dexedrine for six months and lost 26 pounds. I asked a boy named Gerald to go to the Girl Scout Dance with me. Even though I had lost weight I was still the "fat girl" so he was hesitant but eventually said yes. I bought a black taffeta circle skirt and a white nylon see-through blouse with puffy sleeves to the elbow. It was so pretty and I actually had a waistline.

I guess they thought I had lost enough because Dr. Mary stopped giving me the little pink pills. The 26 pounds came back in less than six weeks. By the time the dance came around, I no longer fit into my new skirt and blouse. The day before the dance I came down with a bad cold. This was the first of many dances I did not attend. I would soon learn that maybe boys wouldn't

ask me to dances but they would make out with me in secret.

When I went into seventh grade, Marilyn moved into the neighborhood. She lived across the street and down about six houses. My good friend Judy lived on my side of the street about ten houses down. Marilyn was very smart and blond with green eyes. Both girls were way cuter than me. I was fat, at least three sizes bigger, and I was also very tall.

We would hang out in Marilyn's attic that had been fixed up like a playroom with real furniture. Marilyn was seeing Butchy an Italian boy her parents didn't know about. I think Judy was seeing Jerry then, one of the handsomest boys in the neighborhood who was at least half Jewish and therefore acceptable. I had a crush on Lenny. He was a "greaser"—black, slicked-back hair, leather jacket, low riding jeans—who went to Seneca Vocational High School, probably the only Jew in the school. I thought he was looked like Elvis Presley and was a dreamboat.

Once when we were all hanging around in Marilyn's attic, I went downstairs to use the bathroom and Lenny followed me. As I was coming out, he pushed me back in, closed the bathroom door and kissed me. I mean really kissed me with his hand closing on my left breast over my shirt. Then he left.

I stayed in the bathroom for another five minutes, staring into the mirror, checking to see if my face had changed, wondering if anybody would be able to tell. I went back up to the attic and it was very clear. Everybody could tell. I had crossed some kind of threshold. I was so proud. Somebody had wanted to kiss me, and cop a feel.

From then on, Lenny and I spent many afternoons in the attic necking and petting on the white rattan couch. Judy and Marilyn did the same with their boyfriends. It was exciting. We got as far as—what do they call it—second base? Lenny touched me under the shirt and inside the bra. As thrilling as that was, it was even more thrilling discussing it with Judy and Marilyn.

Then one day, Lenny stopped coming to the attic. Marilyn said he had a girlfriend. That's when I realized that Judy and Marilyn spent time with their boyfriends outside of the attic, on the street, walking to school, sitting on the front stairs. Lenny and I shared none of that. We were only together in secret. I wasn't his girlfriend. I was the fat girl he felt up in the attic.

I have lots of fat stories. I've spent most of my life being fat. I actually know how much I weighed at just about any age or how many pounds I lost on any diet. When I went on a calorie counting diet at 15, I lost 47 pounds. When I took Fen-Phen I lost 79 pounds. After I had gastric bypass I lost 140 lbs.

Describing how I felt is harder. I was anxious and sad and lonely. I felt different. The only other overweight girl in my class was not smart. Fat was all we had in common.

My mother also worried about her weight. During her years of marriage she put on weight but never became as large as the size 22 she had been at the end of high school. When I worked for the county library in the 1980s, we joined Weight Watchers together. The library had a lunch hour program. I thought we were both doing well until I came across boxes of over-the-counter diet pills in her bedroom.

I felt sad for her, and for me. I knew those pills. I had bought them many times. They never helped. Even the little pink pills Dr. Mary gave me didn't help. They were only the first in a rainbow of uppers that didn't make me thin, only addicted to amphetamines.

7
Coming Out
Part I

Coming out is a process. For some, coming out means having sex with someone of the same sex. For others, coming out means telling someone that you've either had sex with someone of the same sex or you have decided, without benefit of physical contact, that you are gay. My friend Bobbi says she was eight years old when she discovered she liked girls and that was it. I have known other women, and men, who have come out in their forties or fifties. One woman told me "I've been a lesbian since high school," even though she had been married to a man for over 40 years and had a child.

I never recognized crushes on girls in elementary or high school. I do recall having had a crush on a woman when I was in college. She was director of the University Chorale and I would sit, fascinated, as she used her baton to extract amazing music from the group. She was thin and muscular and had long, straight, blond hair and a patrician face. She was married. At that point in my life I had no notion of making a move on someone who I assumed was not gay.

For me, coming out began in 1963 and was finalized in 1966. From the first woman I ever slept with to the realization that lesbianism was my way of life. Friday, November 29, 1963. That's the day I began to come out. Obviously for me to remember the exact date it had to have been spectacular, right? Wrong.

I no longer lived with Scott, the young man who blasted records all night. I was seeing Allen. I knew Allen from Laughlin's. We were not living together but he would come to my apartment, let himself in and read or make tea or join me in the bedroom. I had stopped teaching school, which I disliked intensely, and had started a new job as a case worker for The Erie County Department of Social Services. On Fridays I made home visits and would usually get home before five. On one of these Fridays Bobbi called. She asked if I'd go with her to help push her friend Dawn's car out of the snow.

Bobbi picked me up and we drove in her Volkswagen Bug to Brunswick Boulevard, the next street over from Butler where I grew up. Dressed in a Pea coat, jeans and boots, handsome, beautiful Dawn strutted out of her house looking like Beebo Brinker, my archetypal butch.

For years I had been fan of Ann Bannon's pulp novels of the late 1950s and '60s that featured a character named Beebo Brinker. Tall and slim with slicked back dark hair and green eyes, Beebo was introspective and boyish and fell in love with pretty, feminine women who disappointed her by going back to men. I fantasized that Dawn would become my Beebo. She would romance me but instead of going back to a man, I would be loyal and stay with her forever.

Dawn decided it was too much trouble to dig her car out and we should just go to the bar.

"The bar" was the Senate, a sleazy lesbian gathering place on Rhode Island Avenue on the West Side. Some people said it was dangerous. It was a wide dive of a barroom with

scratched up blacktopped tables and wooden chairs and a floor that was always a little sticky. Andy tended bar. She was a very butch woman who was quick and clever and always on the alert for rough customers. She was much admired and could handle anything and anybody.

I thought it was exciting. I thought Dawn was pretty exciting as well.

We sat at a table near the bar, drank beer and joked with other women. We slow danced, drank more, and danced more and kissed in the shadowed corner of the bar. I had never kissed a woman before. I mean "really kissed" a woman. It felt strange. She was smaller boned than the men I knew. Her face was softer. It was a feeling that was foreign to me but probably because it was foreign it was immediately terribly exciting. Dawn asked me to stay the night with her. I agreed but there was a small problem. We couldn't stay at her place because she was staying with a friend who would not appreciate company. And we couldn't stay at my place because I might have company.

Bobbi said she was going to stay at her girlfriend Karen's house. There were sleeping bags. In our drunken state of passion the living room floor sounded fine.

Drunken sex is not sexy. Handsome as she was, bedding Dawn was not what I expected. I had assumed that with women, I wouldn't have to keep my guard up. I could relax and they would unconditionally love what and who I was and the intimacy would be grand. Forget that nonsense. After I faked an orgasm I was grateful to turn over and go to sleep.

The next morning Bobbi drove Dawn to her "friend's" house—a woman I later found out was her much older lover. On the way to my apartment, Bobbi asked me how it was. I said not to ask. She laughed and said it would be much better when Dawn was sober.

Later that day I accompanied my mother to the optometrist in case they put drops in her eyes and she couldn't see to drive home. As we approached the office building I asked her, "What would you say if I told you my latest lover was a woman?" She continued looking at street signs, "Oh Madeline, You've done everything else. Do I make a left here?"

That's how I came out to my mother. She voiced neither approval nor disapproval. I thought it was weird. I thought I was lucky. I knew many gay children who had been disowned by family and friends.

I did maintain a crush on Dawn and slept with her a couple more times. The sex was successful but she drank too much and had too many problems. She also preferred older women who could support her financially or emotionally or both. We became friends. After Dawn came Little Mo, a nice woman who tried for a substantive affair but also drank too much. At that time alcoholism was rampant in the gay community.

I didn't stay "out". How interesting can it be when you have to get drunk and it's not all that satisfying when you're drunk and you don't like her very much in the morning. That's if you recognize her at all. I was faced with the choice: straight, gay, straight, gay. On the one hand straight was acceptable. Your parents were somewhat satisfied even if he wasn't their favorite. The police didn't put you in jail. The places where you congregated were not raided. You didn't lose your job. Living a gay life was just the opposite. It could alienate your family, cost you

your job and land you in jail on any pretext. And although the idea of being a lesbian seemed exciting, I was not yet in love with a woman.

I chose Allen and marriage.

Allen was bright and kind, handsome and well endowed with a beautiful fine-tuned body. And he was fun, in and out of bed. He worked on motorcycles and smelled like motor oil, my scent of love. We were together a year when we decided to marry. Allen knew I had been sleeping with women. He was approving, assuming I was experimenting and gaining experience. Of course lesbian sex is a primary male fantasy and I assumed he thought it was pretty interesting.

We drove out to Nevada, with our witness, Florence, an old buddy of his. Two kittens, a pan of litter and a bowl of water sat on the back floor of our 1956 Mercury. I had a learner's permit. My mother, although she liked Allen, disapproved of our marriage because he wasn't Jewish. His mother didn't like me at all, probably because I was Jewish.

It took us five days, from the end of June to the beginning of July, 100 degrees all the way pouring ice water on ourselves and the kittens. We made it to Reno, changed clothes in the bus station, registered at the town hall and waited in line behind three groups of young people. My best childhood friend Judy met us there.

The other brides wore flowered cotton dresses with teeny veils, and the grooms wore suits. I wore a purple mumu and Allen, my groom, jeans and wrinkled but clean shirt. In Nevada you had to be 21 to get married. I was 24 but Allen was only 20. So he had to show a letter from his mother. Not an auspicious beginning for a marriage when one has to bring a permission slip. The wedding ceremony took four minutes and twelve seconds. Judy timed it. We didn't even know it was over until the judge said, "Well if you don't kiss her, I will."

We tooled out to San Francisco. It was 1964, a few years before the Summer of Love—hippies, flowers in hair, flowers in guns. Instead of love, we had marijuana, LSD, magic mushrooms, low ball speed like black mollies, a little Ritalin with beer. Gentle stuff in great variety, stuff that made you see things that weren't there and eat a lot of Oreos.

One year later, with no discussion, no disagreements, no enmity, Allen told me he couldn't be a married person. He had to leave. But he wanted me to stay in San Francisco and keep his clothes in the closet and do his laundry on his trips back from riding his motorcycle up and down the coast. I didn't feel there was much in it for me.

I left San Francisco, moved in with my mother in Kenmore and, after six months of mourning began an affair with a gay man named Ronnie who ran a poodle salon and did drag on weekends.

Since returning to Buffalo I found solace with my gay and lesbian friends who kept me busy. In mid-December of 1965, I was helping Bobby and Rick decorate the Christmas tree in their apartment in the heart of Elmwood Strip, a gay section of town, when their friend Ronnie knocked on the door.

Ronnie was pretty and somewhat slight. He had blondish brown hair, lovely skin, a full

mouth, blue eyes and the best smile. He came in and helped us decorate and drink wine. A few hours later Ronnie went down the hall to the apartment he shared with his partner George. He returned ten minutes later with a suitcase and announced, "I just broke up with George. I'm going to marry Madeline!"

We laughed, thinking he was kidding—or crazy. We had just met. He was gay. It was ridiculous. His partner George called on the phone. He wanted Ronnie to come back to the apartment so they could talk. Ronnie went but within moments there was banging on the door. There was Ronnie, coughing and holding his throat. "George. He tried to choke me with the telephone cord."

Ronnie asked if he could stay at Bobby and Rick's that night and if I would stay with him. He was very upset. I said yes. We slept in the guest bedroom; there was no sex. I said I couldn't marry him but if he wanted to spend time together as friends I would be willing.

For two months we were inseparable. After work I would go to his grooming shop. We would have a meal together. He introduced me to his mother and all his friends as the woman he was going to marry. After a while I stopped protesting. We finally made love one January night when we stayed with friends in North Collins, a town southwest of Buffalo.

It was Ronnie's first sex with a woman. For me it was sweet and passionate. For Ronnie it was Mount Everest. Since he was able to perform he was convinced that he could be straight and we would marry.

That weekend, as I fastened the hooks on his girdle and combed out his blond wig, I thought, "I'll bet this won't work." Then Ronnie disappeared. He actually disappeared. No phone call. No note. His clothes were gone. He had vanished. I would finally hear from him five years later. He was living in Toronto with a young man named Paul. He said he had left because of Shane.

Shane was a very butch woman who had been interested in me. We had become friendly through the bars and when she found out I was seeing Ronnie she went to him without my knowledge. The resolute and intimidating Shane told Ronnie that if he hurt me she would kill him. He left.

When Ronnie called from Toronto, he wanted to reestablish our friendship and asked if I would I visit. By this time I had embraced lesbianism. I went to with my friend Anne. It was awkward. Time passed. A couple of years later I received another phone call. Ronnie was in Buffalo, had become a Jehovah's Witness, and was marrying a church member, a woman named Pat. I warned him against it to no avail. They married and had a daughter, but Ronnie could not escape what he was. When their divorce became final, he was not allowed to see his own child according to the rules of the church.

Over the years there were more calls. Ronnie continued to allude to marriage. I continued to change the subject. Then after ten years there was silence. I often wonder what happened to him.

I still think of the night I helped Ronnie slip into a lush green velvet gown, did his

makeup—green shadow, luxurious false eyelashes, perfect blusher—and assisted with the golden curls of his wig. He was feminine and gorgeous; the last man I would love.

8
Coming Out
Part II

In 1966, I took my new butch lover, Shane, to my Grandmother Rose's house, the house in which I grew up. I knew Shane from the bars. She worked at Trico on an assembly line making windshield wipers and car door latches. She dressed like a man, kept her hair short and wore a binder like many butch women in the 1950s and '60s. The binder was usually an Ace bandage wrapped around the chest to conceal breasts and create a smooth, flat front.

I became involved with Shane when I was feeling bad about Ronnie's sudden disappearance. I had been spending time at the Eagle Inn, a gay bar at the south end of Washington Street in downtown Buffalo. It was a great bar with tables in the front and back and a decent sized dance floor where I learned line dances like the hully gully and the hustle. Mostly men sat at the bar and groups of both men and women sat at the tables. It was a friendly place and most men and women seemed to get along. It was a bar I had gone to with Ronnie. Everyone knew him there. Everyone also knew Shane.

Shane commanded a certain amount of respect and when I spent time with her at the Eagle Inn I felt safe. After Ronnie disappeared Shane verified that she had warned him, "If you hurt her I'll kill you." She said it so simply. I was flattered. I had no idea she had threatened him because she wanted me for herself. But Shane must have scared Ronnie to death. She was tough and could be extremely intimidating. I can only imagine the tone she must have used on Ronnie. No wonder he took off for Canada.

After Ronnie left town, Shane courted me relentlessly. We developed a friendship; she flirted outrageously. It was fun and I liked her. She was handsome and cordial. We laughed a lot. It was easy to fall into a pattern of spending time with her. I also found her to be somewhat shy. It was either a part of her flirting technique or the fact that I was a little different from her previous girlfriends—Jewish, intellectual, musical. It was easy to be attracted to her. She, like Ronnie, he a girlish boy, she a boyish girl, appealed to my fascination with those who live on the sexual and cultural edge.

Falling into romance with Shane was easy. She courted me relentlessly and I succumbed to the flattery, focus, compatible interest and her wanting to wait on me. The latter is really important to me. I love being cared for, and adored.

I told Shane I was ready to move out of my mother's house in Kenmore and was looking for an apartment. She managed a building on the corner of 18th and Rhode Island and said a ground floor apartment was going to be open in a month. Was I interested? She said if I paid for paint, she would make sure the apartment was in good shape. It sounded perfect.

What I did not know was that Shane would evict a couple from the apartment so I could move in, and that she was living upstairs in a relationship with a femme woman named Nina. It seemed they had been involved for quite some time but Shane told me that they were roommates

and not lovers. I would learn that Nina's view of the relationship was quite different.

I moved in before the decorating was complete. Every morning I would drive to my job at the University of Buffalo where I was a Romance Language cataloger and took graduate courses to earn my MLS. Every evening I would return home to find Shane painting walls. She would stay later and later into the night. She put five coats of white paint in the living room. She said it was necessary to cover the printed wallpaper. Then she put six coats on the bedroom walls. There had been no printed paper.

It was obvious that she was hanging around waiting for me to give some indication that she could stay. Every time I was in the room with her she stammered and blushed. Although I was certainly not in love with her at that early stage, I found her attractive and compelling. Finally, as she continued to stay, day after day and into the late evenings, making her desire progressively clearer, I relented and invited her to spend the night. She definitely made it worth my while.

We woke the following morning to crashing and banging on the front sidewalk. Nina was throwing pots and pans and stove parts out of the second floor window. Shane started screaming and bolted upstairs to have a "talk" with her "roommate". Nina moved out within the week. Still Shane insisted she and Nina were not in a lover relationship. Nina knew different.

I enjoyed Shane and our lovemaking. Everything felt right. She was warm and exciting and had amazing expertise. With Shane I not only became part of a couple but together we attained a certain niche in local gay society. She was an old-time butch with her own "street creds" and a solid factory job and I was the intellectual femme with the admirable profession. We became a well-known part of the bar scene and I felt as comfortably at home as I felt genuinely in love. I had become so attached to Shane and our community that one morning I looked into the bathroom mirror and said aloud, "This relationship might not last my lifetime but I'll be part of this gay world forever."

Next, I told my family about my affirmed lesbianism. My mother who, on the way to the eye doctor, had paid scant attention to my previous pronouncement that I had a woman lover remained disinterested. I brought Shane to meet my Grandmother Rose.

The three of us had coffee and we talked about everyday things. At one point I got up and went into the kitchen and Rose followed me. She said, "Madeline, he's very nice, but don't you think he's a little young for you?"

I laughed, "Gram, he's a girl, and she's three years older."

Without missing a beat Rose replied, "Oh, okay. Do you think she would lay some linoleum in my kitchen? It's pretty worn and I'd like a new piece."

A week later, Shane taped down a green and white squared sheet of linoleum in my grandmother's kitchen. Gram loved it. Gram loved Shane. They became great friends.

It did not take long, however, for my assumption of my family's total acceptance of my lesbianism to be shattered. I can't remember who said Shane couldn't go to the wedding. My sister Sheila said it was mother's choice. I believe her.

Sheila was married in 1968 in the little mid-New York State town of Elbridge, south of Syracuse. She was teaching Art at the Jordan-Elbridge School and one of her colleagues said she would be happy to host the wedding. I had never met her fiancé. He was a postgraduate student in biochemistry at Cornell University and when we met he seemed to be a very nice and smart fellow. At least Sheila thought so and that's what counted.

It was a lovely fall day and Shane offered to drive mother, Mark and me to Elbridge. My brother Mark was 17. I was 28 and had been part of Buffalo's gay community for five years and in a committed relationship with Shane for two years. I can't recall the conversation about Shane not attending the wedding. All I knew was that she seemed to calmly accept the fact that she would drop us off and pick us up 1 1⁄2 hours later and drive us back to Buffalo. All I could do to make myself feel better about Shane was to ask her to hold my necklace.

Shane had given me a beautiful necklace of carved brass beads that I wore that day. It was long and elegant. When we were leaving the car, I took off the necklace and asked her to hold it for me. I said it was because it was too heavy to wear but in reality I wanted her to have something of mine in the car with her.

A judge performed the wedding and everyone seemed delighted that Sheila was getting married. We were the only ones from Buffalo. All the others were friends and work colleagues of the bride and groom.

The wedding reception was awkward for me. Besides only knowing the bride, I was a lesbian whose lover was biding her time driving around the countryside because she couldn't be with me. But I suppose my mother was pleased that no one recognized me as a lesbian because I didn't look like one and nobody asked. So I played the role of older, unmarried sister who didn't even have a date. I was something everyone understood, the spinster librarian.

When Sheila and I recently discussed the wedding, I said, "I always thought mother accepted my homosexuality."

She said, "Sure, yours. But not someone who looked like Shane."

Sheila was right. Mother didn't want to be associated with this boy-girl, this strange not quite man, not quite woman. I guess it was okay to be gay if you didn't look it. For mother, it was fine for Shane to move furniture or fix a lamp or drive us to Syracuse or even to flirt with her, but not to be seen with us in public. Not to be introduced to my sister's new husband and their friends.

This was not clear to me then. But it had to be clear to Shane. She had spent a lifetime being rejected for her inappropriate presence. Butch women who wanted to appear butch all the time were vulnerable to persecution. But I didn't want my mother to be the bad guy. Maybe I didn't want to know that she rejected Shane because it would have meant she rejected me.

Shane was an outward manifestation of what I was inside. I had always thought mother's casual attitude towards my gayness was acceptance. I didn't want to know that what it really meant was that she was ignoring it, hoping it would go away; hoping it wouldn't interfere with our "normal" lives.

It didn't go away. It remained throughout my life. And mother had to live with it.

9
Things Fall Apart

When Shane and I first became a couple in 1966 I was employed at Lockwood Library at the University of Buffalo and working part-time on a Masters Degree in Library Science. Shane told me she would pay the house bills if I wanted to finish school full time. I did. From 1968-1969, I had the luxury of attending graduate school on a fellowship and not having to worry about making money.

This was incredible to me. I was a working class kid who had had a job since I was 12 years old. This was the first and only time anyone ever fully supported me financially. I will always be grateful to Shane for this. Unfortunately, when I became busy with graduate school, Shane became busy with other women and began cheating on me.

All the signs were there, but I didn't want to see them. I was too afraid of losing Shane and being alone. My history of a dateless life haunted me and I didn't trust that I would find another partner. I was shy in college and although I had been intimate with boys I never had a traditional social life. I'm 70 years old and still fantasize about attending a prom. It's hard to get over a lonely adolescence. There is always fear.

Shane and I had established a home and I didn't want to lose it. Even as a fighter for rights, a woman who takes chances, I was invested in security. I knew what a pension was. I worked in a professional job for 30 years. I learned it from my dad who had no job security. His plant moved from Buffalo to Ohio in the late 1950s and he had to go to work for my uncle in the jewelry store. He hated it. I felt horrible for him. My mom believed this was why he got cancer and died. I never wanted that to happen to me. So I found a safe job that, thank goodness, I enjoyed.

But in retrospect it was more than not wanting to lose our home or loving Shane. I was attached to Shane to the point where I didn't know where she ended and I began. An attachment, I now suspect, Shane actively and consciously encouraged. She was very clever and I might even say mesmerizing.

It was wrenching to acknowledge it, but after a time I could no longer deny the problems with Shane. She was neglecting me both sexually and socially. I confronted her and asked if there was someone else. She swore there was not, even though she was spending all her time with one if not two young women regularly, purportedly as "friends." I tried to believe her. But then, why was I being neglected? Our once tempestuous sex life had deteriorated to the point of non-existence.

We had an argument. I said we had been together for almost three years and we hardly ever went out any more. I asked Shane why she never even took the time to sit down and have a conversation. She only wanted to be with her new friends. The discussion became heated. She became defensive. I started to cry. Why wouldn't she even talk to me?

Shane said, "Because you're boring."

I was devastated.

This was the same woman who had put multiple coats of paint on my bedroom walls so she could spend time with me. What had happened? Had I changed? Was I really so uninteresting that she needed to get away from me?

I was heartbroken. I was living with the woman I loved and our life was falling apart. We had bought furniture and had a dog. We put together a home. I went into the bedroom, closed the door and wept. Shane left the house. I felt it was my fault. I was not handling my first long-term relationship with a woman well enough. I did not know how to hold on to a partner, male or female. Would Shane leave me for someone more exciting? The sadness was overwhelming.

I walked around the house trying to list what was interesting about me. I worked in libraries helping people make exciting discoveries. I had a life on the stage. I was a performer, a musician, a poet and a composer. I performed in coffee houses, bars, festivals and concerts. I was Buffalo's only out lesbian singer. I was a soloist with the University Chorale and half dozen church choirs. My voice brought people joy. I could make an audience laugh. I energized. I soothed. It was a powerful experience every time, and it was anything but mundane.

And I was an actress, whether in legitimate theater or on stage as a singer. I wore colorful costumes, long tie-dyed caftans and vibrant silks and velvets. Groupies wanted to carry my guitar. One woman wrote me a letter that took up three large napkins. She adored my music and wanted to meet. This was not an isolated incident. After I came out, people told me they appreciated being entertained by someone who was clearly proud to be gay and it gave them strength.

This does not constitute boring.

In the fall of 1968, not long after Shane said I was boring, I joined a jazz rock band, The New Chicago Lunche: seven male instrumentalists and one lesbian lead singer. We rehearsed during the week and performed on weekends.

The boys thought it was fascinating to have a lesbian singer. I think they were titillated by my life. They told more people about it than I did. One of them flirted with me to the point of being obnoxious. I'm sure his thought was, "You think you're a lesbian but you haven't tried me." But the rest were respectful. Our gigs in predominantly straight venues always attracted small groups of lesbians. The band thought it was very cool and cosmopolitan. Sometimes we played to large crowds; sometimes to smaller, more intimate groups.

I adored singing with the band and enjoyed hanging around with them. They were creative and both musically and intellectually stimulating. Most of our time together, both at rehearsals and performances, was fun. There was great humor and, because a band must be coordinated, we all had a sense of taking care of each other on stage.

In comparison, life with Shane had been frustrating for too long. Maybe it had even become a little…boring. But I was committed. Perhaps I was so insecure I could not give up even a bad relationship. But, I was also 29 years old and physically and emotionally alone. I thought about having an affair but I couldn't chance it with a woman in the community—Shane

would have found out. Then the opportunity for an affair with a man came along. I became involved with Steven, the trumpet player in the band.

Sweet and bright and uninterested in either permanency or jeopardizing my lesbian life, Steven Halpern was a music student at the University. He was a talented, tall handsome red-haired Jewish boy from Long Island. I would sneak over to his apartment weekday mornings after Shane went to work, and spend an hour or so with him, sometimes in bed but mostly laughing and talking. We listened to each other. We shared a love of music and we discussed alternative spirituality. He espoused Macrobiotics which I found odd but interesting. Occasionally we would spend an entire day at Lily Dale, the center for Spiritualism. We delighted in discovering the many aspects of our beliefs.

The affair ended after Steven graduated from college and moved to California in the fall of 1969. My time with him, as pleasurable as it was, was very much apart from my lesbian life. I knew my real life was with women. Steven would mark the end of my intimate relationships with men, although we would remain lifelong friends.

I stayed with Shane. I still didn't want to admit that the love I felt so deeply could be wiped out so completely. I hated it that she made me dislike her. I hated it that she had left me, emotionally and physically. I wanted it not to be true. Of course, no matter how much I told myself it was her need to run around and she couldn't be loyal to anyone, I felt it was my fault. I wasn't present enough, pretty enough, entertaining enough. I couldn't be new and she wanted new. Even the applause of an audience or the attention of a good man could not keep me from thinking Shane was right. Maybe I was boring.

My partner Wendy just noted that any time I criticize a performer, a play, even interchanges with particular people that I found less than interesting, I pronounce them boring. I have said to her on more than one occasion, "You can love me or hate me, I don't care. Just don't bore me to death."

I hear the echo of my own words and it is clear to me that Shane's hurtful comment became a part of me. It makes me sad to know that I absorbed her dreadful criticism and made it my own. And it angers me when I realize that Shane may have manipulated my feelings and played on my insecurities knowing exactly what she was doing. I had become so emotionally dependent on Shane that the thought of breaking up was too painful to even contemplate.

10
Gay Liberation Comes to Buffalo

In June of 1969 at the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in New York City, gays and lesbians rioted against decades of police harassment. The riot spread throughout Greenwich Village and lasted for three days. A new energy infused the New York gay community and a wave of activism burst onto the political scene. Although "Stonewall" made front page downstate news, in Buffalo it was hardly a blip on the radar screen.

Buffalo, unlike New York City, is a large, middle American small town. A gay riot 450 miles away was of note to a few, but didn't engender political exuberance. For most of us, what was happening in New York City was happening in another world.

After years of police raids, the entrapment of men in gay gathering places and the harassment of lesbians on the street, most of us assumed Buffalo gay life would continue as usual: furtive and dangerous, existing in a universe parallel to but separate from the life people led at work and with their families. There had been exceptional gay people who chose not to hide; Butch bar dykes and drag queens audaciously chose to be visible and often paid the price of job loss and family ostracism. After the Tiki Club raid, however, some from the community decided they could no longer hide and had to take action.

In late 1969, a private bottle establishment called the Tiki Club, located on lower Delaware Avenue, was raided. Names were taken. People were herded into paddy wagons. A woman who had an epileptic seizure during the raid was not allowed treatment during the arrests. It was one of the worst raids we ever had in the Buffalo bars. Everyone was scared—and some so incensed they went public to fight for gay rights.

In December of 1969, Jim Garrow, owner of the Tiki Club invited Frank Kameny, to speak at his bar. Frank was a founder of the Washington, D.C. Mattachine Society, one of the oldest gay rights societies in the United States. Over a hundred gay men and lesbians attended the talk, including my partner Shane.

Frank advocated the formation of a "homophile" organization that would work for Gay Liberation (homophile was the term used by the early gay rights organizations to indicate the legitimacy of same-sex love). Frank was forceful and inspiring and within a couple of weeks the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier was born. Gay Liberation had come to Buffalo. We were energized. Lesbians and gay men would work together to make Buffalo better. The organization elected officers. Shane became Chair of Grounds and Properties.

I didn't attend that first meeting. I was not at all interested in a political lecture or any other form of politics. Shane loved it. She was thrilled with her position. She came home excited about organizing, creating a center, demanding our rights. Not me. I wrote poetry and music. I sang at coffee houses and gay bars. I did not engage in politics.

Then Shane asked me to set up a gay library on the second floor of the building that housed the Tiki Club. No politics, just books and magazines. I agreed. It would be an

interesting challenge since there was very little gay and even less lesbian material available. I also thought creating the library Shane requested might help mend our relationship. She attended Mattachine meetings at the Tiki Club and I wanted to spend more time with her.

With the help of a few Mattachine members we cleaned up one of the rooms above the club. The boys moved in a couch, an easy chair and a few lamps. They put in a coffee table, two end tables and a throw rug, all scavenged from attics and basements. It made for a cozy room.

I pulled together books I had collected, copies of The Advocate, a gay newspaper from California, and The Ladder, a publication of the Daughters of Bilitis. People donated works by Radclyffe Hall, Gore Vidal and Oscar Wilde, and even pulp paperback novels. With the addition of flyers and health brochures we established a small reference and browsing collection.

We were open before, during, and after Mattachine meetings and often on Saturday afternoons. I was usually the only staff member unless a volunteer came in once or twice a week. A few people came to use the library. Mostly it was used as a quiet room where people could talk or have small meetings and not be disturbed. It was a very pleasant place and I liked being there. I've always loved being a librarian no matter the setting.

Shane was delighted with the facility and encouraged friends and Mattachine members to use it. Sometimes she would sit with me and interact with visitors.

One evening, after having straightened up our little literary sanctuary, I went down to the meeting in the back room of the Tiki Club to wait for Shane. I sat in the rear, certain I would not be interested in the meeting, all these motions and seconds and Roberts Rules. Then the first time someone offered a plan to approach the police I raised my hand. I was hooked. For a ten dollar membership fee, I became part of a political process that would last the rest of my life.

Unfortunately, the formation of a gay organization didn't stop the Tiki Club raids. They continued into the spring. There were charges for operating a bottle club, or running a jukebox without a license. Most of the raids and charges were obvious harassment and each time names and addresses were taken and published in the newspaper. The organization paid small fines and kept on meeting.

That June, I was asked to be Mattachine's delegate to the annual meeting of NACHO, the National Conference of Homophile Organizations. The meeting was in San Francisco and I drove out with Wally Ward, a high school teacher, to represent western New York's gay community. The sessions were held in a swank hotel meeting room with a boardroom table for officers and seating for delegates. I was chosen secretary for the conference. I was honored.

We were in the middle of a discussion of political strategies when a group of angry women came to the door demanding to address the delegates. At their head were Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, well-known lesbian activists.

Del said they were divorcing us. I didn't even know we had had a relationship. I knew about these women from reading The Ladder, but I didn't really know them, and they certainly didn't know me. What had we done that they were divorcing us? And beyond that, they asked why I was sitting up there taking notes. I was astounded. I was working for Gay Liberation. I

was from Buffalo. I was a revolutionary in a local movement that was barely six months old. They couldn't divorce me. I was a lesbian. I loved women and slept with women and wrote songs about women and sat in bars with women who had carved out women's space for years.

They talked about sexism and women's issues and how the men didn't respect them and how women were been relegated to making coffee. I never made coffee. I was insulted. I was hurt. And I was angry.

The rest of the conference was a complete blur. Now I know that this "invasion" was indicative of something very big and very important; the lesbian feminists had arrived and they didn't react too kindly to femme dykes like me who wore makeup and skirts and, even worse, took notes.

I went back to Buffalo to work for gay rights but I couldn't stop thinking about what had happened. These women had burst in with their righteous anger and created an impression that would stay with me. They irritated like a bit of sand inside an oyster.

As for Shane, by the early part of 1971, about a year after I had started the library, I finally had had enough of her affairs. I confided to our friend Terry that it was time for me to leave. Terry had been spending a lot of time at our home while Shane was off with her friends. She told me that it was not my fault; Shane had a history of infidelities for years. Terry supported my leaving and revealed her interest in having more than a friendship. I told her I needed assurance that my lover would be by my side. Terry offered that assurance and we began an intimate relationship.

In a short time I felt strong enough to leave Shane. I began packing and moving my personal things to our friend Paul's apartment. Shane didn't even notice.

In February I called Shane at the apartment of one of her women friends. I said, "I'm leaving. It's over." She was incredulous. She couldn't believe that I was no longer going to be there when she came home from her affairs. But I was resolute; I had someone I could count on, Terry gave me the strength to leave, and I left.

Leaving was very hard. We had a wonderful dog named Robbie. I knew I would miss him. But he had been Shane's before I was with her so I had to leave him. That was the worst part of leaving. The best was that I was finally free of the degradation of being left behind as if I were useless and burdensome and boring. I still don't fully understand why I allowed myself to stay in the relationship for five years.

Shane spread the word throughout the community that she was devastated and her life ruined. Of course it was untrue and she survived quite well. Nancy, one of the two young women Shane had been seeing, moved in with her by spring of 1971. Shane and I did not remain close but are cordial. I still treasure some of the time we were together. I remember the beginning when I admired her strength; I like to think she really loved me. I now see that Shane was authoritative, presumptuous and loud—but not strong. I now know what strong is.

As for Buffalo's first gay library, it lasted as long as the Tiki Club was host to Mattachine, about a year. When the club became a legitimate bar called The Avenue, no one

visited the library any longer. The couch was used for other purposes and the books collected dust. I packed everything in boxes and took them home. Many of them now reside in the Madeline Davis GLBT Archives.

After leaving the Tiki Club, the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier went on to open its own Gay Center and began the difficult daily struggle for Gay Liberation.

11
They Call Us Dykes

Every year in June, Buffalo celebrates the Stonewall Riots, the uprising in Greenwich Village that began the current fight for Gay Rights in America. There are parades and floats, songs and speeches. I delivered these remarks to a lesbian group at the beginning of Pride festivities in 1994, commemorating the 25th anniversary of Stonewall.

Dyke, lesbian, femme, butch, queer. These are some of the names I have been called and have given myself since my first exposure to gay community in 1957. I wonder at the evolution, and revolution, in definition and self definition represented by these labels we have had in the latter half of the 20th Century. This year, at the Pride march marking the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, marchers in New York City carried placards that would have confused, insulted and outraged gay men and women in previous decades. Women whose heyday was the '50s and '60s still shudder at the casual use of terms like dyke and queer. These words, that at one time would have engendered physical confrontation are now tossed off casually by a younger generation whose knowledge of the old definitions comes from history books and community mythology. What relationship does today's queer have with yesterday's butch or femme? Can you really no longer tell the players without a program? Does knowing what the players are even matter anymore?

I came out into a gay world in which "lesbian" was a derogatory term; "queer" was a denigrating word used only by bigoted heterosexuals; "dyke" was something you did rather than something you were, and when someone shouted "Mary" across a crowded barroom, as many men turned their heads as women. Today, the woman with whom I spend the most intimate time, and I, refer to ourselves as butch and femme lesbians. We also call ourselves dykes in political context and queer when describing the vast cross section of persons who are not straight. In the 40s and 50s, for women, butches were the "real lesbians". Femmes were considered straight even if they had never been with men because they could "pass". If you called an old time butch a lesbian to her face you would cause a confrontation. A femme would only refer to herself as a "gay girl".

By the late 60s and early 70s a wave of young women began to "invade" our bars. They called themselves lesbians and told us that the labels butch and femme were outmoded and unnecessary. Women's Liberation had freed us from the need to find or choose a role. We no longer had to "imitate" straight society. After all, we were all women.

But many of us who had lived in a role-defined community for so long were loathe to give up the comfort of our roles. We and our friends had long discussions about "the Movement" and how much less confusing it was in the old days when we were simply gay. We knew who and what we were, who and what we wanted socially and sexually and we were suspicious of the women who intimated that we were doing it wrong. What did they know? They were just kids.

However, these new women, with their radical feminist ideas, still intrigued us. From them we learned economic and political theory. We learned to discard some of the social strictures that had been making us uncomfortable. And we learned the meaning of sisterhood in the struggle against a more defined enemy, not necessarily men but patriarchy. It was, however, in our intimate lives that we had much to teach these women who had figured it out intellectually but who had yet to test their theories in the real world. We taught them bar and street etiquette; the public posture appropriate for defense; the nuances of making friends and attracting partners and the techniques of successful love making. We gave them a community identity and a history.

In the process of exchange we also learned to name and rename ourselves in ways appropriate to our evolving needs. Some threw out the terms butch and femme, only to reclaim them later. Some stated that we were not gay girls but lesbians. Only men were gay. Some asserted that they were not only lesbians, but dykes and proud of it. We took the old labels, freshened them up with a coat of analysis and bravado and created a new courage that could change everything.

The history of our names is a history of our development as a group struggling for its rightful place in the world. They are neither good nor bad. Rather, they represent who we have been, who we are, and who we hope to become.

12
My Brother's Story

I look at old photographs of myself: a beautiful baby, a stunning little child. There's one with pigtails that stick out and a tooth missing and one with dark ringlets and bright eyes. The later ones aren't as attractive. The chubby face and forced smile, the yearly school photo of a once carefree little girl who wants to be anywhere but in front of a camera.

I see an even more distant and disturbing look in a photograph taken of my brother Mark at his Bar Mitzvah. He is standing next to our mother. They are not touching. He is wearing a brown suit. She is wearing a beige and cream dress. They are both gazing straight into the camera with no expression. He is 13, wearing glasses. He is a little boy who doesn't like being with his mother. She is a middle-aged woman who never wanted this child. Her husband, his father, has been dead for two years. At this celebratory event they are separate and stoic.

The photograph is in a file folder in my personal archive box. I won't display it with the other family photos. It is too sad. I try, but I cannot erase it from my mind.

My mother told me that when she found herself pregnant seven years after my sister Sheila had been born, she was shaken and distressed. She was 36 and didn't want another child. She went next door to Dr. Mary and asked for medication to end the pregnancy. The doctor gave her ergotrate to cause uterine contractions that would expel the fetus. It gave her terrible cramps, but the pregnancy continued.

February 22, 1951 my brother Mark was born. My mother was resigned and my father thrilled. He passed out cigars with paper bands saying, "It's a boy." He had never resented only having had girls, but the arrival of a son was a gift. I have photos of daddy holding Mark. In the winter ones Mark is wearing a fuzzy blue and white hat and daddy is grinning. In the summer pictures Mark is sitting on daddy's lap, squinting into the sun, and daddy has his arm around him. There is a photo of Mark and Sheila playing in the back yard sandbox and one of me pushing the stroller. In another, Grandma is holding him and beaming. We looked like a happy family.

Mark was not an athletic kid. He preferred to sit in the house and read or go to his friends' homes and play with erector sets. Putting little metal pieces together to make things work like Rube Goldberg devices would carry over into his adult life when he would spend hours on his computers.

Mark also had a "lazy eye". The muscles that held the left eye in place were loose and his eye would stray inward especially when he was tired. The eye clinic gave him a "clooter". I believe it was actually called an occluder. It was a patch over his good eye under his glasses that was supposed to make the weak eye work harder and become stronger. Mark's self-confidence was already shaky and this didn't help. Now he was a nerdy Jewish kid with an eye patch. When he was eight he had surgery to tighten the muscles and no longer had to wear his "clooter".

I don't think Mark had big dreams about what he wanted to be when he grew up. He

didn't talk about becoming a doctor or a policeman. He did have a cowboy hat that looked pretty cute with his glasses. But one thing he loved, above all else, was music.

Mark wanted to play music more than anything in the world. Unfortunately he was made to suffer for his sisters' lack of perseverance. I gave up piano lessons at about age 14. My sister Sheila, who had played guitar in the school orchestra, gave up her lessons as well. Therefore, music lessons were withheld from Mark because mother was not going to spend any more money or time on another kid who would surely quit.

At age 20 I moved out of the house to live with my boyfriend Carl, attend college fulltime and work a part-time job. Mark was nine. I was neither an immediate part of nor a direct observer of his daily life. I would visit home on occasion. My sister would go about her business and ignore my intrusion on her teenage space. I didn't visit often but when I did, Mark was always happy to see me. I wasn't there when Mark experienced the lingering cancer death of our father and the subsequent downward spiral of our mother's mental health.

When I left Buffalo in 1964 to marry and move to San Francisco, my brother was 13. A year later, when the marriage ended, I moved back to the house in Kenmore. Sheila was teaching in a small town near Syracuse so it was my mother, Mark and me. I think my brother liked having me there even though he mostly spent the time outside of school at the homes of friends. But one thing I know he appreciated about my living at home was that he got to play my acoustic guitar.

He loved playing so much that when he was 15, I bought him an electric guitar and amplifier. He would sit for hours playing records and rehearse the chords and solos until he got them right. And all of it was by ear. Mark never read a note of music. I knew he loved to play but never realized the extent of his talent until then.

Still, I can hear mother's shrill voice screaming when Mark was practicing, "Turn that damn thing down!"

When Mark was in college he bought a hammer dulcimer and taught himself to play. I watched him figure it out and I was envious. It is a complex instrument with strings like a piano. However, unlike a piano, you carry it around in heat, cold, snow and rain. And it is in constant need of tuning. He began to play at bars with his friend John accompanying on guitar. I saw them at a bar called The Library on Bailey Avenue. Their harmonies were perfectly synchronized. Their college friends, grouped around tables, applauded and whistled after each song. I was so proud of him. And Mark was proud of me.

When my brother was a junior in college he invited me to be a guest at his Sociology class. He was excited to present me as not only a lesbian and a leading participant in the local Gay Rights Movement, but as his sister. I'll never forget his introduction: "This is my sister, Madeline, and she's a lesbian and she works with the Mattachine Society for Gay Liberation." It was a pin drop moment.

In the early 1970s, Gay Rights was still in its infancy in Buffalo. The class was fascinated, partly by the fact that I was speaking openly about sexuality, and also by the bravery

of Mark's acceptance and support.

I was not at all nervous about speaking to a class. By that time I had spoken before numerous college classes and had been interviewed on radio as a member of Mattachine's Speakers' Bureau. But this time I was very conscious that I was doing this especially for my brother.

The students were full of questions: How did you figure out you were a lesbian? Do you hate men? What did your parents say? Do people at work know you're gay? What about the church saying it's a sin? What does gay politics mean? Have you ever been arrested? These and many more questions took up the hour and a half class.

My brother Mark was about 23 when he left Buffalo. He traveled with his girlfriend Daryl to Boulder, Colorado for a couple of years and then to San Francisco. He hoped to find his own way and become a professional hammer dulcimer player. I thought he had a good chance; he could even play Mozart on the instrument. When people asked me what my brother was doing, I would answer, "He's a musician in San Francisco." And I would glow.

I visited him in San Francisco when he was playing near Fisherman's Wharf. Talented, handsome and very funny, people gathered around him, fascinated by him and delighted by his music. He would form Moose Records and Tapes and make three recordings, one mostly classical pieces and music from films and two Christmas albums. They never sold enough to make him famous or rich but gave him exposure and he played a lot of local gigs, especially during the holidays.

During the years Mark lived in San Francisco we made weekly phone calls. He was one of the funniest people I've ever known. Snide, clever, smart. When he told me he was getting married to a woman named Barbara I thought, "This Barbara better be able to hold her ground. Mark is a handful." There were times when it was hard for Barb, but she is intelligent, decisive and was very much a match for my brother. She also helped raise a daughter they both adored.

Jody was born a few years after Mark and Barb were married. I know everyone says the same thing about children, but this kid was special. I have a photo of her in a high chair eating Spaghetti-Os with sauce all over her face and a huge grin breaking through. It's my favorite picture of my niece who is 22.

Mark was often a stay-at-home dad and made sure his daughter had piano lessons and guitar lessons—the lessons he never had—and that her talents were nurtured. At her Middle School, Mark became a volunteer and installed a new computer system for the faculty and students. Everyone loved him. When he died they installed a bench outside the school with a plaque bearing his name.

In January, 2001, Mark had a heart attack and died just before his 50th birthday. He had been ill with Sarcoidosis for many years and took large doses of Prednisone for the pain. Both Jody and Barb were sitting around the kitchen table with him when he said he didn't feel well, got up, walked into the living room and fell to the floor. My telephone rang at around midnight.

My partner Wendy and I, and my sister Sheila and her partner flew to San Francisco.

After Mark's funeral, we spent the day with Barbara, cleaning out his study, filled with years of piled up junk. Like me, he had difficulty disposing of things. 30 bags of debris went to the city dump. When we were finished I led a cleansing ceremony to make the space ready for Jody to move in and make it her room. She painted it purple.

I have regrets about Mark. I regret that he grew up in a household of declining empathy and sympathy. I was pre-occupied with my own life, going to college, being a performer, going through a marriage and a divorce, discovering I was a lesbian and beginning a political life. I didn't fully experience or understand our mother's worsening depression and anger until years later when I became her caregiver. It's hard to imagine growing up around the woman our mother became after our father passed away. I wish I had been there for Mark.

I will always be proud of my brother, a supremely talented musician, computer expert and a loving husband and father. I see the wonderful aspects of him in his daughter. Jody is studying Public Health Policy and Environmental Science. Like her dad, she cares about "tikkun olam", repairing the world. She is, like him, creative, resourceful and bold. She is also stubborn and determined. And she resembles her mom, cerebral, assertive and compassionate. Jody and Barbara are very close. Mark would have liked that.

13
Butch/Femme and the Feminist Revolution

With some lesbian couples, one partner may appear more mannish and the other more feminine. These are often called butch-femme relationships. To those unfamiliar with lesbian dynamics, it may look like one plays the boy and the other the girl, but it is much more complex and anything but a male-female dyad. In sex, the predominant aim of butch women is to please their femmes—something I certainly never experienced with men after the courting was over. The femme partner may, or may not be the sexual aggressor. To further complicate matters, there are as many versions of butch-femme relationships as there are lesbians. The only consistency is that in the public lesbian community, before the 1970s, women had to identify themselves as one or the other.

Are you butch or femme? In the lesbian world of the 1940s, 1950s and early '60s—at least in Buffalo, New York—you chose. Not choosing was almost unthinkable; it made you immediately suspect. The few who did not choose were called ki-ki or neither-nor and were considered untrustworthy. You never knew whether you could trust your girlfriend to spend time alone with someone who was ki-ki. Would they be a pal or a threat?

In the early 1960s, when I was first coming out, no one ever asked if I were butch or femme. I guess with my long hair, peasant dresses, dangling earrings and eye makeup it was obvious. I was femme. And, I was attracted to butches, women who didn't replicate but resembled men. Actually, with their smooth faces and swaggering walks they more closely resembled boys.

I loved being a femme in this world. For the first time in my life I was treated as if I were precious and desirable. Butches showered me with the attention and kindness I did not expect nor receive from men. There seemed to be more butches than femmes around when I came out and I benefited from the paucity of femme competition for butches' affections. It made me feel pretty and sexy and special. I also felt confident that just about any butch I chose for a lover would know how to handle my body. I was right.

Butch-femme sex turned out to be better than chocolate. Femmes, unlike heterosexual women, were not expected to provide sexual service but were the undeniable recipients of sexual concentration and expertise. For me it was completely different from sleeping with men whom I had to teach to make love to me and whose focus was predominantly on themselves. I trusted butch-femme sex far more than I'd ever trusted sex with men. Perhaps that is why passion came easy. And I appreciated the passion of these women lovers. They seemed to overlook my faults and delight in my attributes.

This is not to imply that my entry as a femme into the gay community in the 1960s was all smooth sailing. Among some I was not totally accepted as a lesbian. Older butches in the bar community felt that my heterosexual past, coupled with the fact that I liked being made love to—which was what they actually enjoyed in a femme—was counterintuitive to their definition of a

lesbian. They had had the experience of some of their femme girlfriends going back to men and many were leery about having their hearts broken that way again.

To them, butches were true lesbians. The ideal butch, the "stone butch", made love to her femme but refused reciprocity. She was referred to as untouchable. Most of these untouchable butches were able to fantasize a profound masculinity. This combined with the desire to please their partners led many to experience spontaneous orgasm.

Newer, younger butch lesbians didn't appear to be quite as suspicious of their femme girlfriends. But young or old, I respected all of these butch women. Life was hard for them. As a femme I wasn't recognizable as a lesbian on the streets. Most butches were more identifiable and were harassed, ridiculed and often provoked into fights by men. As a femme, I could also hold a well paying job.

Butch women, if they wanted to appear butch all the time, were often relegated to low paying jobs like driving taxis, tending bar or working in small industries. In Buffalo, a number of butch women worked in a factory that made candles and other wax products. The job didn't pay well but the women could dress as they chose.

It never occurred to me that it might be easier to be with a more feminine looking woman, that we could avoid harassment because we wouldn't be recognized on the streets as lesbians. I fell in love with these boyish butches, one after another. This was my nature.

In 1971, after I left Shane, I entered, once again, into a traditional butch-femme relationship with Terry. She had black, curly hair and huge dark eyes. She laughed easily and I felt comforted by her as we untangled me from the old relationship with Shane.

Terry was a fine writer. She had written some wonderful stories and poems. But none of her talents had led to employment. She received disability payments, and so, with a small but steady income and free time during the day, she took care of the house and the animals while I worked. Given the jobs available to butch women, it was not unusual for the femme member of a butch-femme couple to be the major breadwinner.

As a butch-femme couple, it was especially challenging and interesting when Terry and I attended a meeting of the new lesbian-feminist organization.

We had heard that a Radicalesbians group had formed at the University. We were curious. We had both been active in Mattachine and wondered how the new lesbian-feminism differed from gay and lesbian rights. Were these college women the lavender herrings that straight feminists of the Women's Movement had been afraid of? Were they the lesbians who were going to "spoil" the movement by being too obvious? Within the upper echelons of the Women's Movement, lesbians were not welcome if they were out.

The young lesbians were angry and their answer was to form a movement of their own.

We older dykes wanted to hear what these young lesbians had to say. So in the early winter of 1971, Terry, our friend Bobbi, and I, decided to attend a meeting of Buffalo Radicalesbians.

When we arrived, there were about ten young women at the meeting. They were very

welcoming. I think they were excited that we were bringing with us our experience with working-class bar life. Their world was different from ours. Most of these women spent their time on campus. Our social life was in the bars.

We found, early on, that most had also studied and admired Marxism. So I suppose our being working class gave us some status. We were "the people" and they were the self-effacing "bourgeois" politicos trying to make us understand the theory of rising up and overthrowing. I thought it was interesting but I couldn't figure out how our lives fit into that picture.

Soon, the inevitable discussion came up about butch-femme. Even though these women all wore wrinkled jeans (we ironed ours), flannel shirts and work boots, we could easily tell who was which. But if we pointed it out, they were quick to state that being in roles was simply mirroring the patriarchy and we no longer had to do that. We were counseled to break out of our patterns and just be women-loving-women. It all sounded so progressive. Liberty, Equality, Sorority. Hear us roar.

I found their criticism of butch-femme disconcerting. Our personal lives, our sex lives, our community lives, were quite fulfilling. We felt strong and determined. We were there to explain how we had survived. They were there to explain a new way of thinking.

The meetings were fascinating and I learned a great deal but some of the new thinking left me confused. One was the Political Lesbian. Some straight women had decided that to have relationships with men was supporting the patriarchy. So they chose to be only with women and some had affairs with women even though they were predominantly attracted to men. What they didn't consider was that having an intimate, sexual relationship with a woman usually includes an emotional component. These women often hurt lesbians. It didn't seem right to me. We needed straight women allies, not fake lesbians who broke hearts.

Terry, Bobbi and I became members of Buffalo Radicalesbians. We continued to learn about feminism and the bonds of sisterhood. We took these young women to our bars and they learned about the importance of a gay community that, for decades, had struggled for its own space. They had a great time and some of them, through long discussions and intimate encounters, even learned to improve their sex lives.

Butch, femme or lesbian-feminist, we believed that we would all bring much to the battle for civil rights. In theory, that seemed a balanced and rational outlook. But it wasn't that simple. We struggled with each other's ideas. We often became frustrated. Sometimes discussions ran hot. But we did learn to listen to each other at least some of the time.

I was tempted by lesbian feminism but I found that this vision of equality was a little too lock step for me. Living according to a set of rules was irritating. Appropriate language, appropriate dress, appropriate relationships, and appropriate thoughts. I also noted a degree of anti-Semitism, particularly directed at Jewish women from New York. Although I only witnessed this behavior occasionally, I found it bigoted and cruel. However, there were women who were kind and caring. I stayed for the good parts.

Rapid transition is difficult; we were living through an abrupt seismic shift in women's

culture. To the some butches I was not an authentic, real lesbian. To these new lesbian-feminists, I was the wrong kind of lesbian. When I look back I am amazed at how quickly things changed and how stubbornly we clung to the past while reaching towards the future. Some days it felt a little crazy.

14
Speaking Out: Albany, Miami

Coming out to family can be painful. I was very lucky. I wasn't afraid to tell my family and they were more accepting than most. Coming out to the entire world, however, was different. I was terrified. I knew people who came out publicly and were rejected by those around them, turned away by religion, lost their jobs and the lives they had known. But coming out to the world can also be the start of a new life. It can be exuberant. It can be awe-inspiring. It was all of that for me.

In the fall of 1970 Jim Zais, head of Mattachine's Political Action Committee and a professor of Political Science at the University of Buffalo, said it was time to take our case for gay rights to the streets. There was going to be a conference of New York State City Councils in Buffalo. Council members would be staying at the Holiday Inn on Delaware Avenue. Jim wanted to organize a picket line to protest the treatment of gays and lesbians across the state. About ten people came forward. I was not one of them.

Those of us who had sensitive jobs felt we couldn't afford to be that open. Although I performed in public, on stage, sometimes with a band, where I wore outrageous glittering gowns and sang romantic songs to women, that was Madeline Davis the glitzy femme dyke singer. Unbeknownst to many in the gay community I was also Madeline Romano the librarian.

As Assistant Librarian in charge of children's programming at the Reinstein Branch of the Cheektowaga Library system, I feared I would lose my job if they knew I was a lesbian. To help keep my lesbian identity shrouded, I used my married name at work, although I was divorced by the time they hired me in the summer of 1969.

Librarianship was supposed to be a liberal profession. In library school I learned about censorship and its evils. I believed those who would defend such ideals would also defend non-traditional people. Maybe I could reveal my lesbianism. Then one day my library director had me put behind the desk a copy of "Your Erroneous Zones" by Wayne Dyer, a book on overcoming negativity. She had misread the title, never read the book and assumed it was about sex. I decided against testing whether she would accept lesbianism.

When I attended the Mattachine meeting where Jim Zais organized the Holiday Inn protest, I sat back and watched as volunteers signed up for a picket line. I assumed they either didn't work, were those whose sexuality was accepted at their jobs, or students too young to care. No matter how I rationalized their participation, I knew they had more guts than I.

It was a grey and drizzly day and the picket line was small but the local papers took photos and wrote up the story. It was a first. There had never been a gay protest in Buffalo. I looked at the photographs of Jim, Shane, Donn, Terry, Donald, Michael and the others, and was very proud of them. I resolved that the next public event was going to include me.

In the spring of 1971 we learned there would be a statewide gay rights march in Albany, the state capitol. This time I would be part of the protest. Of course, it was easier for me to

publicly stand up for gay rights in another city. I could be anonymous in the midst of a crowd of hundreds. I guess I wasn't all that brave.

The event was planned for Sunday, March 14th. On Saturday, members of Mattachine and Buffalo Radicalesbians squeezed into cars and made the six-hour drive across the state. We were very nervous but excited about being in this first big march outside of New York City. That afternoon we were assigned couches and floors to sleep on. We stowed our backpacks and prepared for the evening's activities.

Those who wanted to be marshals and provide protection for the marchers were to learn Quaker Training, a non-violent response to harassment. The marshals would form a circle around the marchers and everyone would kneel with their heads down to help ward off violence, should it occur. My partner Terry volunteered and asked me not to because it would be too dangerous. She, on the other hand, four inches shorter and eighty pounds lighter than I, went off to be trained. Butch-Femme at its finest! I was annoyed that she was treating me like a piece of porcelain, but I sighed, stayed back, participated in political discussions and later joined Terry at the dance.

The next morning we gathered in a long, broad line in front of the Unitarian Church, excited to be part of our first full-fledged political protest. The crowd was much larger than we had expected, about two thousand. We were milling around when we heard a cry from the front of the line, "We need an upstate woman! Somebody find an upstate woman!"

Apparently the committee had designated a downstate man and woman and an upstate man to speak from the podium but not an upstate woman. Jim appeared, put his arm through mine, and led me towards the front of the crowd. "We need an upstate woman. You're going to speak." I think Jim had a Svengali effect on me. I set aside my protests and pushed forward.

What would I say? Look at all those people. I tried to pull thoughts together. What would be important? What would they want to hear? What would be inspiring? My brain was spinning.

We were given the signal to march. I asked where the marshals were. I couldn't see Terry. Someone said they were escorting the group behind the leaders and speakers. Where was our security? They said we shouldn't worry, just plow ahead and lead the march. So much for my butch lover protecting me from danger—or my hiding my face in the crowd. I was front and center and terrified. But, adrenaline was on my side. We walked, arm in arm, singing and shouting. For the moment, my fears evaporated. This was our day.

When we arrived at the capitol, on one side were gays and lesbians, chanting and applauding. On the other, anti-gay groups and bikers with chains, bottles and bricks in their hands, looking none too thrilled that we were there. Between the speakers and the crowd were the Albany police, nervous and grumpy. Having to protect a bunch of queers was probably not their idea of entertainment for a Sunday afternoon.

The speakers ascended the stairs and one after the other, asserted our right to live our lives without threat and without laws that demeaned and negated us. I followed Kate Millett to the podium. I only remember a little of my speech. There had been no time to write. When I

told them I was from Buffalo a great cry went up. My final words brought shouts and applause: "It's a beautiful day for a revolution." I left the podium transcendent and trembling.

On the drive home, with the exuberance of the day still reverberating, I wrote, "Stonewall Nation" a song that would become part of my regular repertoire. Friends encouraged me to record it. That summer I rented studio space and made a master tape. The reverse side of the record was to be a poem, "From the Steps of the Capitol, 1971"—very schmaltzy with guitar background. The officers of Mattachine spent money from our tiny treasury to produce 500 45 rpm records. Every member bought one for $5.00. We sent copies to gay bookstores, including The Oscar Wilde in Manhattan. Years later I would be honored to learn that Craig Rodwell, the owner, played it yearly, throughout June, on loudspeakers both inside and outside of the store.

About ten months after the Albany march, in February of 1972, Jim Zais surprised me with a very late night phone call. I couldn't imagine what he wanted. He asked, "Are you a registered Democrat?" I said no. He was astonished. "You're not a Republican are you?" I said No! "Well then, what?" I'm not registered at all. I've never voted. I've been apolitical all my life. (I was 31. My parents were devoted Democrats but I had rejected traditional politics.)

"Well," Jim said, "Tomorrow you're going to get yourself down to the Board of Elections and register, and don't forget to check the box for Democrat." Why? "Because we're running you for delegate to the Democratic National Convention for McGovern. When you get back, call me."

My Svengali was so intent and decisive, all I could say was, "Yes, sir."

It never occurred to me this could turn into anything real. I thought it was at most public grandstanding that would make the newspapers. I registered the next morning and called Jim. He told me I was to appear before a committee that was choosing the delegates to run on the McGovern Slate. Jim thought I might have a chance. This was going to be a Peoples' Convention with mandates requiring a certain number of women and minority delegates.

I went to the Unitarian Church to be interviewed by the McGovern committee. They asked why I wanted to be a delegate. I said, "I'm a lesbian. We have never been represented at a national convention. We have worked too long on the sidelines. The attempt to have gay issues considered by trying to sneak them in the back door hasn't worked. We need to be out there, on the floor, talking openly about being second class citizens and about obtaining the rights we deserve."

They called me that evening. I had a place on the ticket.

Then the hard work began. We took petitions around the district for signatures. I spoke at community groups and everywhere in the gay community including bars. Our campaign generated a lot of excitement.

The election for delegates to the Democratic Convention was held on June 20, 1972. We gathered around the television, watching the results. There were the usual mishaps: lost ballots, voting machines that "froze", problems with registration cards. By ten p.m. the stations called the winners. I couldn't believe it. I'd won. I even won over the Chairman of the Erie County

Legislature, Jim Keane, who came from a prominent political family from south Buffalo's Irish district. Almost the entire McGovern slate was elected. Only one delegate from the Muskie slate won and that was Mayor Makowski.

After I was elected delegate, I was informed that I would be giving a speech in favor of the gay rights plank in front of thousands at this televised national political convention. I decided it was time to tell the Reinstein Library that I was a lesbian.

I knew I was risking my job so I chose to tell the Chair of the Board, Mrs. Julia Reinstein. She was a powerful figure on the library board and was also the town historian. I knew she was aware that her daughter was a lesbian. Perhaps she would be sympathetic.

In the pouring rain I drove out to the Reinstein home, an historical building in what is now Reinstein Nature Preserve, and sat in Mrs. Reinstein's living room full of books, Persian rugs and antiques. My hands shook. I smoked cigarette after cigarette. We had tea. We made small talk about libraries and books and history. She showed me her rare copy of the Book of Kells. Finally she asked, "Why are you here?"

I swallowed hard and told her I had been elected a delegate to the Democratic convention." She said she knew. She had been following my career. Even though she was a Republican she thought involvement in politics very important. There was silence. I explained that I had to give a speech at the Convention. She said how wonderful and for me to let her know when and she would listen.

I told her that she didn't quite understand and in one long breath said, "It'saspeechinfavorofagayrightsplankintheDemocraticplatformI'malesbian."

Mrs. Reinstein replied, "Oh, I know, my dear. I'm a lesbian myself. I've been a lesbian since I was in high school. How would you like see the Reinstein antique quilt collection?"

With my head reeling she escorted me to the quilt depository, lined with racks and shelves of exquisite antique quilts. After a short tour I left, still in a stupor. I never expected that my coming out to her would end in her coming out to me.

That Monday at work I decided it was time to tell the library director. That was even scarier since she was the person I worked with every day and had been the one concerned with erroneous zones. I asked to speak with her in the craft room. She was a very nice older Polish woman who was also a devout Catholic. I anticipated the worst. After I explained about the election and the speech she said, "What time will you be on? I'll listen!"

I told her that I had been afraid she'd react badly about my being a lesbian. She said, "Madeline, we've known that all along. You're not accosting little girls in the bathroom so why should we care?"

Once again, I was astounded. I wasn't going to lose my job and I was going to the Convention. It couldn't get any better.

15
Miami: Two A.M., 104 Degrees

The election for delegates to the Democratic Convention was held June 20, 1972, and the next morning the Buffalo gay community awoke to stunning news. We had elected a lesbian representative to the convention in Miami Beach to speak to the Democratic Party about including a Gay Rights plank in the Democratic Platform. Of course only gays involved in politics and the National McGovern Committee were aware of this groundbreaking event. Most people had no idea that an enormous breakthrough had occurred. I did not realize its importance myself.

I was the first out lesbian delegate, and Jim Foster, a member of the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club and the Society for Individual Rights in San Francisco was elected the first gay male delegate. Jim and I would meet in Florida the day after my birthday, July 8, when we became part of the Gay Democratic Caucus, headquartered in a luxury suite at The Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach. (Years later I would learn that a fellow from New York City charged the hotel suite on his credit card and after the Convention declared bankruptcy and walked away from a very expensive bill).

Activists came to Miami from all over the country to lobby, strategize, promote and advise. Agendas were set up, lists made, representatives chosen for tasks, position papers edited, pizza ordered and nobody slept. Activity was frenzied. After all, this was the first convention with "out" gay delegates. I was overwhelmed by the political sophistication. All the activists I had read about in the gay newspapers were in those rooms. I was a novice, a greenhorn. At 31 years of age I had only been involved in gay politics for two years. These people had decades of experience. I was scared to death and having the best time of my life.

During the week long Convention we lobbied every state delegation and almost every caucus. I personally spoke with delegates from California, Pennsylvania and New York. They were polite and nodded a lot. We sought audience with Frank Mankiewicz, Gary Hart and others close to McGovern. Mankiewicz gave us five minutes. Hart, nothing. I remember standing outside of Gary Hart's office being told that he was not in. As we were leaving we saw him walk quickly down the hall in the other direction. No one would let us near George McGovern.

On July 11, the night before we were scheduled to speak, Jim Foster and I wrote our three-minute speeches. I went to my room at the Diplomat Hotel with a fresh yellow legal pad and a sharpened pencil. I sat on the bed, staring at the empty page, not knowing how I would present the Gay Rights Plank to the Convention and to the country.

Then I thought about why we were there, my friends back home who had been beaten and jailed. I thought about those whose parents had rejected them and those who were afraid to lose their jobs. I began writing. My anger at how unfairly we were treated poured out onto the paper. I wrote furiously without stopping. The draft was three hand-written pages.

We were scheduled to speak some time after 11:00 p.m. on the evening of July 12th following speeches on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment. In the dressing room Jim and I sat with Shirley McClain whose speech preceded ours. She was gracious but focused. We were nervous but committed. Everything took longer than expected and it was after 2 a.m. before Jim and I were called to the podium.

We ascended the platform stairs, aware of the rarified air surrounding some of the country's most influential politicians seated behind us. We looked out through Plexiglas safety barriers at an audience of over a thousand delegates. The lights were brilliant. The television cameras were recording. My heart beat furiously; my hands shook. This was an experience my people had never had before.

We spoke about fairness and equality; about recognition and love. We were clear and articulate and very emotional. We were talking about our lives. After substantial applause we both thought our plank might have a chance.

As I stepped back onto the convention floor, I was approached by a very tall, Hispanic man dressed in black. He leaned down to be heard over the noisy delegates and said to me, "What you did on that platform was brave. I want you to know that we will take your issue back to our workers and make sure they are aware of it." He then took a small black and silver thunderbird pin off his lapel, fastened it to the collar of my blouse, hugged me and said, "You did a good thing. Keep working." He turned and walked back into the crowd. I was thrilled to find out he was Manuel Chavez, the cousin of Caesar Chavez, leader of the United Farm Workers. That pin still adorns my jean jacket and is a prized possession.

I was so caught up in this very special moment that I almost missed the next speaker. A young Ohio delegate named Kathy Welch mounted the podium to give the rebuttal to our pro-gay speeches.

She cited the "fact" that gays prey on children; that we proselytize; that a vote for this plank would open the door to multiple marriages and bestiality. It was horrifying to hear. What made it worse was that we knew McGovern people had coached her. They wanted to defeat our issue by any means. Subsequently, the McGovern team sent a memo to all delegates recommending which way to vote on the issues. When it came to the Gay Rights Plank they advised "vote your conscience". We knew it meant, "VOTE NO." The delegates complied. The Gay Rights plank was rejected.

Even though we had lost the vote, over a dozen delegates came up and congratulated me and Jim for our bravery. Others turned away. For some this "People's Convention" was obviously not for everyone. Many who looked past us as if we weren't there were feminists who had come to support the ERA. It made me sad to think that sisterhood was exclusionary.

Still, the experience emboldened us. We had been heard. And it put me in touch with a network of gay activists all around the country. I met Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church—America's first gay religious organization—and Jim Kepner, one of the country's great gay archivists. These are friendships we maintained for almost 40

years.

The day after our Gay Rights speeches, we all went to a tent camp that had been set up for an alternative convention down near the beach. A gay kiss-in made the papers. They displayed banners and signs. We sang into the night. We were joined in the water by those who didn't believe in party politics and those who hadn't been invited but came anyway. We swam with Allen Ginsburg and his partner, Peter Orlowski. There were large numbers of people both in and outside the Convention Center and we were privileged to spend time with many of them.

On my return to Buffalo, I was greeted at the airport with posters and signs of support. Buffalo gays had been so proud to be represented. I was presented with a tape of the speeches from that night and was particularly satisfied when I heard the words of CBS commentators Walter Cronkite and Daniel Schorr. Cronkite said, "Even if you do not agree with this issue, you must recognize that it is a portent of things to come."

I arrived home exhausted and disappointed that the plank had failed. It required so much work and had been so well crafted by members of the Chicago Caucus and activists from my hometown. But we knew that even though it had failed we had at least planted the seeds of a national dialogue.

All in all, I came home to an overwhelming outpouring of love and pride. There were congratulatory phone calls and requests for interviews from local papers. But there were difficult moments. The Dunkirk, New York newspaper published my home address. Was that planned or simply stupid? I also received a few crank or overtly negative phone calls. And I had some interesting face-to-face encounters.

I was driving to work one morning in late July when a white van behind me began beeping and flashing its lights. I sped up and moved into the right lane because I thought the driver wanted to pass. He moved over and continued beeping and flashing. I exited the Expressway and pulled over to the side thinking that perhaps my tire was going flat or my trunk was open. The van pulled up behind me. A young man, about 30, got out and walked towards my car. I locked my doors and only rolled down the window about two inches.

He asked, "Hi, um, are you Madeline Davis?" I didn't recognize him and became nervous. I said yes. "And you were the one who spoke at the Democratic Convention?" Now I was really apprehensive. Was he going to smash in the window? I nodded. Haltingly he stated, "Well, I saw you on TV and I, uh, I'm married but I think I'm gay. Is there anybody I can talk to?"

I was so relieved I almost started to giggle from nerves. I was also impressed by his effort to make a connection with a stranger he saw on TV. He was clearly in pain. I gave him the number of the Mattachine Hotline and a couple of names of counselors He thanked me profusely and got back into his van and drove away. Calming down I sat for a few minutes, grateful that for at least one person, my trip to Miami was worth it.

After the Convention, I thought the local Democratic Party would view me as an embarrassment but soon after my return, I was asked to fill a term as Committeewoman from my

district. There were really no opportunities to bring up gay rights at the committee level but my presence alone made people uncomfortably aware: We are everywhere.

16
Democratic National Convention Speech
Gay Rights Plank July 13, 1972

My name is Madeline Davis. I am an elected delegate from the 37th Congressional District, Buffalo, New York. I am a woman. I am a lesbian.

The reformed structure of the Democratic Party, concerned as it is with the rights of all people, makes it possible for the first major National Convention in history to hear representatives of twenty million American gays. Twenty million citizens who live in a political exile because, up until now, no major political party has seen fit to address itself to our needs. For this historic opportunity to speak to you, twenty million Americans are grateful and proud of the Democratic Party.

We are the minority of minorities. We belong to every race and creed, both sexes, every economic and social level, every nationality and religion. We live in large cities and in small towns. But we are the untouchables in American society. We have suffered the gamut of oppression from being totally ignored or ridiculed, to having our heads smashed and our blood spilled in the streets.

Now we are coming out of our closets and on to the Convention floor to tell you, the delegates, and to tell all gay people throughout American, that we are here to put an end to our fears. Our fears that people will know us for who we are, that they will shun and revile us, fire us from our jobs, reject us from our families, evicts us from our homes, beat us and jail us – and for what? Because we have chosen to love each other.

I am asking that you vote "YES" for the inclusion of this minority report into the Democratic Platform for two major reasons:

First, we must speak to the basic civil rights of all human beings. It is inherent in the American tradition that the private lives and life styles of citizens should be both allowed and insured so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others. A government that interferes with the private lives of its people is a government that is alien to the American tradition and the American dream. You have before you a chance to reaffirm that tradition and that dream. As a matter of practicality, you also have the opportunity to gain the votes of 20 million Americans that will help in November to put a Democrat in the White House.

And secondly, I say to you, I am someone's neighbor, someone's sister, someone's daughter. A vote for this plank is a vote not only for me, but it is a vote for all homosexual women and men across the country to peaceably live their own lives. I wish to remind you that a vote for this plank may now, or some day, be a vote for your neighbor, your sister or brother, your daughter or your son.

We ask for your vote because we have suffered long and hard. We ask you now to help

us end that suffering and re-affirm for every human being, the right to love.

17
Lesbianism 101

Growing up a working-class kid from the city's east side it never occurred to me that one day I would ever teach at a university. So it was amazing to me in the fall of 1972 to not only be teaching at U.B. but to be teaching the first Lesbianism course ever offered at a major university in the United States.

The late 1960s and 1970s were radical times for the American Studies department at the University of Buffalo. Students could study progressive topics such as Socialism, Feminism and militant leftist politics. At the forefront of the feminist effort was Professor Elizabeth Kennedy founder of the Women's Studies College, a cultural anthropologist with whom I would spend fourteen years researching and writing a book.

1971 was the year I met Margaret Small, a doctoral student of Dr. Kennedy's, at Radicalesbians meetings. We discussed the innovative courses that were being taught but we realized there was nothing in the Women's Studies College specifically about lesbians. Margaret and I talked about co-teaching a lesbian studies course as part of the Women's Studies curriculum. When we discovered that no other university was teaching a lesbianism course we realized that we would be the first. The challenge was both exciting and daunting.

In the summer of 1972, we got to work looking at the existing literature available for a syllabus. There was little to choose from, but we did find some fine articles in back issues of "The Ladder", the publication of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first national lesbian organization. We found articles by gay women who had been writing in feminist publications and were fortunate in having the first books published on lesbian-feminism: Sappho Was a Right-On Woman by Sydney Abbott and Barbara Love, and Lesbian Woman by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon.

Our syllabus was approved and in September, twenty students enrolled in WS265, what we called, "Lesbianism 101."

WOMEN'S STUDIES 265:
LESBIANISM: A CULTURAL, PERSONAL AND POLITICAL VIEW
Madeline Davis and Margaret Small, instructors
Sept. 7 Introduction
Sept. 14 Coming out
Sept. 21 Radclyff Hall, THE WELL OF LONELINESS
Sept. 28 Novels of the fifties – read from selection
Ann Aldrich, TAKE A LESBIAN TO LUNCH
Oct. 5 Isabel Miller, PATIENCE AND SARAH
Oct. 12 MYTHS AND THEORIES ABOUT LESBIANS

Wolfe, LOVE BETWEEN WOMEN, chap. 3
Radicalesbians, "Woman Identified Woman"
Thompson, "Sex and Sexuality"
Chambers, Part I
Sue Katz, "Macho and Monogamy"
"Up from the Butch Trip" article from THE LADDER

Oct. 26 Class Differences among Lesbians
Guest panel
FURIES, issues III and IV

Nov. 2 The Black Lesbian
Guest speakers
Readings to be selected

Nov. 6 The Lesbian Mother
LESBIAN/WOMAN chap. 5
Issue MOTHER-LOAD

Nov. 16 History and Development of the Lesbian Movement
LESBIAN/WOMAN chap. 8, 9
SAPPHO WAS A RIGHT-ON WOMAN chap .5
"If That's All There Is"
"Dance Lesson"

Dec. 7 Towards a Woman's Culture
EDWARD THE DYKE
Selected poetry, songs, art

Dec. 14 Male Supremacy and Sexual Repression
SAPPHO WAS A RIGHT-ON WOMAN chap. 8, 9
The Lesbian in pornography
Additional articles to be assigned

Guided research and papers for extra credit.

The first day we introduced the all-women's class to Rita Mae Brown's "The Woman-Identified Woman". It began, "What is a Lesbian? A Lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion."

I don't think the women who took the course expected such a militant depiction of women who loved women but it certainly caught their imaginations. Unfortunately the two straight women who had enrolled in the class dropped out immediately. I suppose Rita Mae was a bit extreme for them. But the women who stayed were thrilled with both the raging politics of the class and the unmistakable raging sexuality in the room.

During the semester at least three relationships formed and, unfortunately, a couple dissolved. The students were so excited to be able to discuss their lives and to tear apart and put back together some of the most radical works published during this wave of lesbian-feminism.

Until this course, there had been no place for young lesbians to be able to analyze what "the personal is the political" really could mean. Here they could feel both challenged and safe.

I loved teaching the course. (This was not my first teaching experience. In 1963, straight out of college with a B.A. in English, I had taught at Clinton Jr. High, an inner city school where discipline was as important as learning. I was a complete failure and I hated it). But teaching in a college was a dream. The students wanted to learn. And I wanted to give them the best materials available and the best lessons from my own life.

I passed on coming out stories, information on the gay and lesbian movement locally and around the country, and tales of lesbian life in the bars and on the streets of Buffalo. I was beginning to feel like an "elder" in the community even though I was only 32. It felt good to have my work and my experiences valued by women of the next generation. It was also gratifying that they thought the experiences of lesbians that came before them were important. Margaret and I were truly satisfied that we were giving these young women a unique experience. We probably learned as much from their questions and discussions as they learned from us.

Not only was this course a great success, but "Lesbianism 101" developed and continued to be part of the Women's Studies curriculum for close to a decade.

18
She Finds a New Lover; I Find a New Life

I remember when I was small, watching my great aunt's hands as she worked the shuttles used for tatting. I remember my grandmother's hands as she embroidered towels, pillowcases and tablecloths. I remember my mother's hands, fixing tears in our clothing and working fancy stitches over them so the repairs wouldn't show. My hands could feel their needles work in and out of cloth, over and under threads, creating useful and beautiful things.

I was proud that my maternal grandmother Rose had been a part-time seamstress and hat maker and my paternal grandfather, David, a tailor. He owned a tailor shop in a building on Niagara Street. (He kept a Polish mistress in an apartment above his shop but I was not privy to this information as a child). I was very interested, however, in his sewing.

My mother and grandmother taught me to sew on an old treadle machine. I loved the heavy machine with its fancy iron scrollwork. I would sit on the floor and watch my grandmother's feet pump back and forth to make the needle go up and down. It wasn't until I was at least ten that my legs were long enough to reach the big iron pedal that said "Singer" in the middle. For my first school project in sewing class I made a red and black flannel bathrobe that was too tight at the neckline and ballooned out at the bottom like a tent. The shoulders came down to my elbows. It took me a while to get the knack.

I was also fascinated by the beauty of embroidery and fine needlework and would read every needlework book I came across. In history books I found references to middle class women who, after the Civil War and the loss of the men in their families, took up the art of delicate embroidery, constructed and embroidered crazy quilts with silks and velvets and, incorporated their talent for design into clothing and home furnishings. These women had never cleaned houses or worked in shops and this was a way to keep themselves and their children both alive and true to their class.

I particularly liked reading about Candace Wheeler. The 1893 World's Fair in Chicago included wonderful embroidery, lace and tatting exhibitions set up by Mrs. Wheeler. Her biography covered her work with Elbert Hubbard who founded the Roycrofters in East Aurora, a small town just southwest of Buffalo. The photos and drawings enthralled me. I wanted to make those artifacts and study them and the people who made them.

My interest in embroidery continued into adulthood. In 1972, I applied for and received a grant to attend a week-long seminar on 19th century culture in Cooperstown, home of the New York State Historical Association. In October of that year, I went to the seminar, delighted to be studying in an historical setting but especially looking forward to seeing the quilt collection.

Although I would miss my partner Terry, I felt secure leaving the house and care of the animals to her even though she had been drinking heavily for some months. She had gone into therapy and seemed to be in control of her life again. By this time I also felt we were compatriots

as well as a committed couple. I had not only fallen in love; I considered Terry the love of my life. I wanted to once again trust her to take care of everything that was important to us.

I called home a few times during the seminar and was satisfied that all was well. I couldn't wait to tell Terry about the 19th Century farm and museum; the musicians who played fiddle and mountain dulcimer with whom I was privileged to play guitar during a jam session. The quilt collection was exquisite and I hoped to be able to duplicate some of the patterns. I bought books describing the area in and around Cooperstown and anticipated sharing my week when I returned.

I came home to discover Terry in the midst of an affair with Carol, her therapist.

I walked into the living room with my suitcase and they were sitting on the sofa together, looking guilty. They welcomed me with lots of nervous laughter and rapid talking. I asked what was happening and Carol said she had something to say. My heart started to pound. She told me that they had become "closer" in the week I had been away and had had sex. I became dizzy and sat down. Carol said it would not happen again. Then the unexpected situation took a bizarre twist. Terry was not apologetic and sorry that she had cheated on me; she was shocked and angry that she and Carol were not going to have sex anymore. But Carol was emphatic. She said she had acted inappropriately and was very sorry and she told Terry it shouldn't be repeated.

Terry was upset. She expected that the affair would continue. I have no idea how I was supposed to figure in the picture. Perhaps I wouldn't. But Carol had already discontinued Terry's therapy and was now discontinuing the affair. She was not gay and this was not what she wanted. Carol apologized to me and quickly left the house. Terry was disappointed and furious. Admittedly, it was hard for me to conjure up sympathy.

After pleading with me to stay and listen, Terry said her intention was never to leave me, whether or not she continued the affair. Instead, she wanted both of us. She asked me to stay and forgive her. Although her betrayal was hurtful, I felt that her straying had as much to do with her alcoholism as it did with her attraction. I stayed with Terry. The therapist moved away to Boston to pursue a doctorate. Things at home became more peaceful and I wearily began to allow the relationship to heal. Terry and I tentatively settled back into calm and security. I started writing a lot: music, poetry and a play.

The play was titled "Liberella", a parody of the Cinderella story with all parts played by women. In this version, Cinderella falls in love with the Fairy Godmother and they run off together, away from the self-involved, arrogant prince. It was not only a comedy but a spoof on male egoism and the response to it, romance and friendship between women, a political statement on lesbian feminism.

Terry was supportive of "Liberella" as she had been of all my work. It was very satisfying to be able to share my experiences with someone I assumed was neither competitive nor jealous. And she was pleased to have a part in the play.

"Liberella" was staged as part of a Buffalo Pride event in June. Terry, who was absolutely tone deaf, sang the theme song, "Some Day My Prince Will Come". She was very

funny. Judy, a Junoesque redhead, played Cinderella, in a pink tutu. The cast was silly, their timing excellent, and the audience loved it.

Terry and I had become friendly with the cast and continued to see quite a bit of them after the play ended. In January of 1974, Terry told me that she and Judy, the woman who played Liberella, had become emotionally involved. I still can't believe I was naïve enough to expect monogamy from someone who had already cheated. By the next month Terry decided to end our relationship and leave town with Judy.

Within two weeks they packed up and left for Boston. I don't know how significant it was that Carol had gone to Boston a year before to attend school. The break-up was hard on me. I was in love with Terry and my heart had been broken once again.

But, true to my pattern of not wanting to spend time alone, as soon as I knew about Terry's affair, I began a flirtation with Linda. And, as Judy and Terry pulled out of the driveway, I phoned Linda who appeared at the house in minutes. Linda was the best band-aid I could have had. She was sweet and kind and kept me laughing. The affair lasted about four months. Linda finally broke it off. She was open and honest, admitting she was not in love with me and it would be unhealthy for us to continue. I admired her forthrightness and we have been friends ever since. After she left, I finally began to mourn Terry.

It is hard to describe this kind of mourning. None of the books on surviving break-ups tell how very physical it can be. When Linda left I was alone with the memories of Terry. The house and all that was in it reminded me of her. I would sit in the living room reading, and would look at the empty chair across the room and my arms would hurt. I hid in the bedroom, not wanting to walk through the house and see the table where she had set up her photo equipment or the desk where she would write. Sometimes I felt my brain freeze because I couldn't tolerate thoughts about our four years together. I wouldn't be able to focus. I would stumble and have to hold on to a doorway or a chair. It took a long time for my head to clear. Her telephone calls would bring it all back and I would react with quiet anger. And when I put down the receiver I would feel like throwing up. It was a terrible time.

Terry called me regularly from Boston. I think she was in love with Judy but missed her old life with me. The relationship with Judy soured rather quickly and within six months they parted. Terry decided to stay in Boston and got her own apartment. About three years later she returned to Buffalo. Her next relationship would be with Pat, the woman who played the Fairy Godmother in Liberella.

While I mourned the loss of Terry I also became involved in one short-term relationship after another. Some lasted a week, some a month or so. I was in too much pain to consider any of them having a future. Although I don't remember specifically, I probably found consolation in food as well.

Finally, I decided to do something more constructive. I learned that a full tuition fellowship was available at Women's Studies College. I applied and was given tuition and, because I had full time employment, I turned over the room and board portion of the fellowship

to a student who needed living expenses.

In the fall of 1974 I returned to school and began working on my second Master's Degree, My focus was on Women's History, and specifically, the history of American women and needlework. I would both study and work with the craft. The fabric, the intricacies of patterns and color, and the stories of the women who created beautiful things would keep me busy. The time for grieving was over.

19
Playboy

The call from Playboy came on a winter evening in January or February of 1973. Terry and I were still together and had a few people at the house. We were schmoozing and laughing when the phone rang. A man who identified himself as Joe said he was calling from Playboy Magazine for Madeline Davis. I thought it was one of my brother Mark's friends joking around. But Joe said no, he was a journalist and Playboy was doing an article on modern trends in sexuality. The Rev. Troy Perry had given him my name. I had met Rev. Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church, at the Democratic Convention. Convinced Joe was legitimate, we set up an appointment for the following week for him to come to Buffalo and interview me.

When I told Terry and our company about Playboy, everyone was shocked. Playboy? There was a heated discussion about whether it was appropriate to be in a magazine that we all thought objectified and sexualized women. We did not have a high opinion of Hugh Hefner. I was sure he had no opinion of us.

I agreed with everyone that Playboy generally demeaned women but then I noted that I had also read some very interesting articles in it. (I know. It's what men say when they are caught looking at the centerfold!) I said okay, women usually didn't buy Playboy but many of the men in their lives did. If they read my words it might help make a difference. Maybe having an open, out and proud lesbian in the pages of Playboy might do some good.

Before the interview, I had visions of a long black limousine with a bunny on the front pulling up to the house. Instead, two men, one big and burly and the other small and wiry, arrived in a yellow taxi. They brought in their equipment, a complicated looking tape recorder, a sound boom, lights and a six-pack of beer. They set up in the dining room, with me across the table from Joe. He interviewed me for about three hours. He was very pleasant, not particularly confrontational, but thorough.

During the interview, I repeated some of the more radical things I had said such as Lesbianism being the healthiest and most natural way for women to be because women knew each other better than men could ever know women. Joe just nodded and continued asking questions. I admired his unflappability.

Afterwards, I worried. Could I have said this instead? Could I have been clearer? This was going to be in national print and it was somewhat unnerving. But over the next months, Joe sent me pieces of other people's interviews and asked me to respond to their remarks by mail. The article would appear as a roundtable discussion in which we would make statements and respond to other's remarks. I was more satisfied with these answers since I could take the time to rethink the issues.

The Playboy article came out in September, 1973. The cover read, "Playboy Panel: New Sexual Life Styles." It also featured a woman's prominent, though lovely, thighs and derriere. I

brought the magazine to work at the Cheektowaga library. Everybody read it and was impressed that somebody they knew was in Playboy. The gay community was abuzz with comments, most of them favorable but with the requisite number thinking that I had sold out.

I was glad I did the interview; I am still glad I did it. It was a first, a breakthrough of sorts. I hope it touched at least a few of the people I wanted it to reach.

Here are some of the questions and answers printed in the article. I have also added my current opinions.

Are the new sexual lifestyles as widespread as we've been led to believe?

You know, there's been a type of split mythology about Lesbian sexuality. One version, usually found in pornography written by men, portrays lesbians as totally sexual animals out for nothing but sexual satisfaction, which is untrue. The other version is that Lesbians are just lovely friends who hold hands and run through fields of daisies, and there's no sex. Like a Salem cigarette commercial. And that's just as untrue. We enjoy sex and friendship. But, like Dr. van den Haag, I believe sex is important in a person's life when it's readily available. When it's not available, it seems to me somewhat less important. I would feel much more deprived if I didn't have an emotional relationship than if I didn't have a sexual one. I prefer sex in my life, too, but I wouldn't die without it.

This still makes perfect sense to me.

Responding to Rev. Perry saying many (gays) need and want marriage.

I don't think the fact that two people love each other needs to be formalized. Being married means being blessed by the power structure, by the establishment, and I don't want that. I don't want this fucked-up society to say my relationship is OK. I'd feel really weird if they said to me, "OK, within the framework of our beliefs, we will allow you to love each other." I don't need that.

Well that certainly changed. Wendy and I have been married four times in different venues. I love the idea that our Jewish religion, our rabbi and our friends saw us commit to each other in a sacred place. It was joyful and I cried throughout the entire ceremony. We also had a handfasting in the woods with my coven. It was a beautiful ceremony and I felt like we were part of another ancient spirituality. Our Civil Union in Vermont was an attempt to get some kind of legal recognition. It was a pleasant experience but did little to change our lives. Our wedding in Niagara Falls, Canada was entered into because we want the thousand plus rights and responsibilities that all married New Yorkers have. After the governor said New York State would recognize out of state marriages we made the decision to make our marriage legal. We all deserve a piece of the pie.

Reacting to Al Goldstein saying if his wife cheated, he would kill her (since he pays the bills he feels he owns her).

I wish I had a knife long enough to cut those balls off for her. There are so many men who feel that way, it's disgusting. I feel very badly for your wife, Al. I have a lot more empathy with her than I do with you; she's a woman. I'd like to sit around and have some long talks with

her. I guess I'd like to take her into my life for a little while and show her how nice it can be to be an equal person in an equal relationship. I don't care if you do pay her bills; you're sitting on her head.

I still feel exactly the same. Goldstein is an asshole.

Can a person be interested in both sexes?

People do have definite preferences. But those preferences can be reconditioned; I was conditioned to be heterosexual. I was never 50-50. Now my Lesbianism has solidified. There is a rightness in being where I am. With a woman, even when we're fighting, even when there's tension in the air, I just know I'm in the right place. With a man, even when things were nice and comfortable and everything was sweetness and light, something smelled funny. Sounds didn't come through right, things didn't taste right, my senses didn't click. I would never again experiment with a heterosexual relationship. I will never sleep with a man again as long as I live. Not since I've discovered the totality of relationships with women.

This never really answered the question. I know women who identify as bisexual. And I don't doubt that they really feel that way. It still leaves me nervous. They say they are monogamous and that their loyalty is to their lover. But it leaves me up in the air about loyalty to women. On the other hand, the bisexuals I know are ardent feminists, so this is a difficult issue for me philosophically.

Reacting to Rev. Perry commenting that something was missing in his heterosexual marriage

I had a similar experience in my own heterosexual marriage. I was a victim of the same kind of programming all women are subjected to in our society; to get married within a particular age range, have babies, settle down, be a good mother. Being Jewish, I was under pressure not only to marry but to marry a nice Jewish boy. But I didn't; I married a nice Episcopal boy. I liked him very much; I thought I loved him. I think one of the reasons I didn't marry a nice Jewish boy was because of the safety valve. I knew if I married somebody who wasn't Jewish, I could get out of it more easily and with less parental disapproval. And I did, after a year and a half. It wasn't hideous, it was just incomplete. I couldn't understand why nothing was happening. I thought all the things that women think—I must be frigid, orgasms aren't happening, there must be something wrong with me.

I lied. I was totally in love with Allen and orgasms were great. He was the only man who was able to learn to completely satisfy me. We split up because he was younger than I and should not have gotten married at the time. I missed him terribly and loved him for many years after. After having seen him on occasion over the years, the love faded. He has become someone else. So have I. He was very important to me and I wish him the best. Wendy & I invited him to our wedding. He wrote a lovely note saying he didn't expect me to marry anyone else and that it brought tears. I know he loved me as well. Would I have become a lesbian if our marriage had not failed? Yes. I could not have avoided making the discoveries I made.

Do you see a lessening of persecution re homosexuals?

The interesting thing is that people don't get persecuted for fucking; they are prosecuted for talking about it. That's oppression. People aren't usually followed into their bedrooms and arrested for an act; they're arrested on street corners for things like soliciting or loitering for the purpose of whatever. I know of several situations where undercover couples—posing as swingers—have entrapped and arrested patrons of gay bars. But things are improving. On a radio show in Buffalo a few months ago, the captain of the vice squad was a guest, taking phone calls. I got through and asked him, "If you want to get gay people off the street, where can they go?" And he virtually did an ad for the Mattachine Society. That kind of thing would never have happened three years ago. We've made so much noise—by getting out on the streets, wearing buttons, picketing—that they have really had to let up on us. We've learned we have to make noise—to let everybody know that we're around, and that we're not going to take shit anymore.

First, I came to realize that people were and still are arrested for fucking, not just talking about it. And many suffer extraordinary punishment. So much has happened in forty years. Many of us have found a place and a voice. We are part of popular culture, politics, science and business. Still, there are places in America where we are harassed, beaten, excluded from housing, jobs and family. Our young people are tortured and some give up their lives rather than suffer so terribly. We have made great strides but we have very far to go.

<u>On homosexuals not being a potent political force.</u>

You're probably right; we're not as potent a political force as we would like to think we are. But we're working on it. The major reason I went to the Democratic National Convention to plead for the gay plank was not to change laws. I never really expected adoption of that plank, which advocated not only the repeal of sodomy laws in all states but also ensured jobs, housing and public accommodations for gay people. I made that speech because I knew there were gay people out there at four o'clock in the morning, sitting in front of their television sets, waiting to one of their own stand up and say, "I'm here, you're out there, and I love you, and I want you to know that there are people who are working their asses off for you and for us. You don't have to be as afraid as you have been."

Today, as I write this, there is a group of gays, lesbians and transsexuals who are meeting with the Democratic National Committee and some of whom who will meet with President Obama. This would have been unheard of in 1972. We are becoming more and more of a political force. The backlash is potent but we have learned great resilience. There are a lot of us. We have strong public allies. And we vote. Our rights may take a while but they are inevitable. Get used to it.

<u>Reacting to question whether homosexual couples take on male and female roles</u>

Why isn't it possible for a strong woman to be a strong woman? Why does she have to be a butch? In my present relationship, neither one of us is really the butch or the femme. So my lover wears her hair shorter than mine; what does that mean? When we fight, I scream just as loud as she does. We both depend on each other. I suppose some of the old butch/femme relationships still exist, but their impact is diminishing. Women's liberation has done a

tremendous amount to strengthen women's self-image, to make us realize that it's OK to be strong as well as to be weak.

Obviously I was spouting the philosophy of the radical lesbian feminists. I was defensive about people stereotyping lesbians and I hadn't yet learned to defend the value of roles. I didn't know how to articulate how butch/femme was different from male/female because I hadn't mastered either the theory or the language yet. If I were asked that question now, my answer would be very different. It is no longer the 50s when the community made you choose. Roles are now an individual choice. S*ome couples are comfortable in designated roles; some are not. And the community is accepting of either.*

Is there cooperation between gay men and women?

Gay women generally feel ambivalent about gay men. There's a tremendous split in the movement, because gay men are still men and gay women are still women. Therefore, gay men are oppressive to gay women. At this point in the development of the movement, it's important for Lesbians to be together. Women have been alienated from one another for so long; vying for men, jealously scratching out their place in the world—which was only in the shadow of some man anyway. Lesbians are breaking through that alienation and are learning to love each other and to love themselves as strong individuals. That's the importance of separatism.

I still believe what I said about the community of the early seventies. Since that time, however, there has been progress toward reunification. In many GLBT organizations, equality is taken for granted. The world of GLBT politics is much more fluid and accepting today. However, bars are still separate for the most part. There are also all men's organizations and all women's organizations. Which I now believe are absolutely appropriate. Some lesbians continue to feel alienated from gay men and prefer to work only with other lesbians. I am sure there are gay men that feel the same. I am grateful that I now can work in a movement that has options and where I feel comfortable working with my gay brothers and my bi and trans brothers and sisters.

20
The Madeline and Jim Show

James D. Haynes, PhD—that's how he was listed in the phone book and over his door bell! We met at the early meetings of the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier. Jim was head of the Biology Department at Buffalo State College. His partner, Don Licht, was an anthropologist who worked for the Museum of Science. Jim was brilliant and truly funny.

Together we "performed" the Madeline and Jim Show, or the Jim and Madeline Show depending on who was describing it.

In the early 1970's, Dr. Gloria Roblin, an instructor at the University of Buffalo Medical School, contacted Mattachine. She requested a group of gay men and lesbians to speak to second year medical students on issues important to gay and lesbian patients. We would first view two sex movies with all the students, then break up into small discussion groups, each with a medical school preceptor, one gay man and one lesbian.

As members of the Mattachine Speakers Bureau, Jim and I thought it was an important education project. We selected eight gay men and eight lesbians, volunteers who were either members of Mattachine, Sisters of Sappho or GROW (Gay Rights for Older Women). We had plenty of volunteers to choose from. (I suspect the sex movies were an impetus, at least for the lesbians. Many of the women said they had never had viewed porn films. We were all very curious).

Jim and I opened the program by talking about how we wanted doctors to treat their gay and lesbian patients: Don't make assumptions that everyone has or has had a heterosexual sex life. Be sensitive about asking questions. Learn about issues of primary importance like STDs and yeast infections. Don't assume that a woman who has had a child is heterosexual. Some of the students were clearly uncomfortable with us and with the topic so Jim and I would joke with each other to ease the tension. Then we showed the movies.

The lesbian movie was among the strangest I had ever seen. It had a European art film quality. Two tall, slim, naked women with long, straight blonde hair skipped through a meadow of daisies holding hands. They looked like Swedish twins. The film was silent with a lilting musical sound track. The women looked at each other, laughing soundlessly, and after cavorting in the sunshine, dropped to their knees amidst the daisies, picked up hairbrushes—I have no idea where they got them from—and began brushing each other's hair.

It was weird.

They brushed and threw their heads back and giggled and brushed some more. Then they laid down in the grass and flowers and proceeded to have oral sex. The one on her back moved a bit. Not much. The other performed well and clearly moved her head in ways that would not block the camera. There was an orgasm somewhere in there, although we certainly couldn't hear it and were not even sure we actually saw it. Then the lovely ladies rose up out of the blossoms

and holding hands once again, floated across the field and out of camera range.

Thereafter came my comments. All I could say was that there probably were lesbians who looked like that but I had never met any. I had also never brushed my lover's hair or had her brush mine. But perhaps it was something to consider. I also told the students that that wasn't the only way we had sex, and they could ask more about it in the small groups.

The gay men's movie was almost as strange. Two very handsome, very young men stood in a kitchen in front of a refrigerator. They hugged and kissed. Then one reached into a bowl and plucked out a banana. They slowly, and I mean really slowly, began to peel the banana and they grinned as if they were sharing a secret. This movie too, was silent, with some jazzy musical accompaniment. They then shared the banana. One would take a bite then the other. They would laugh and kiss. Then one would take a bite. When the banana was gone, the scene shifted and they were on a bed, having oral sex. The sex went on for about three minutes. You could actually hear students squirming in their seats. Then, an orgasm you could actually see. I did not personally find it exciting but the gay men in our group thought it was delightful.

When Jim commented on the movie he joked that he wished he knew the young men. They were very cute. He also said that there was more to gay male sex. We both noted that the lesbian film seemed to appeal to the mostly male medical students whereas the gay men's film made them uncomfortable. They should talk about this in the small groups. The women in the audience laughed. The men fidgeted.

The women students in my group were full of questions. The male students with Jim seemed inordinately quiet. Some asked practical questions such as how we would like to see gay and lesbian patients treated. Some were curious about lesbians not being interested in penetration, an assumption I corrected. The medical preceptors tried to guide the discussion towards appropriate medical and psychological situations.

Everyone was polite and laughed at our jokes. It seemed we had to be light in our approach or the male students would only concentrate on their shoes.

Our presentation was so successful that we were asked to return. Jim and I gathered volunteers year after year and worked to put on interesting presentations. Thankfully, after about three years, Gloria found a new lesbian film featuring two more realistic looking lesbians with dark hair cut short and blazers and jeans. What stunned me when I first saw this film was recognizing one of the women—after she took her clothes off.

The women had been playing in an amusement park fun house but after they were in bed naked, I suddenly screamed "Holy shit. I know her!" The medical students erupted with laughter. It was Tee Corinne, a lesbian artist I had met at conferences over the years. At one conference in the Catskills at A Woman's Place we had all sat around a pond naked discussing Women's Movement issues. And now there she was, in a movie. I'd never known anyone who had made a sex movie. Well, now I did.

I think Jim and I made some inroads with the medical students—at least opened some eyes. At this time the American Psychological Association had just taken homosexuality off the

list of psychiatric disorders. Sadly, the Madeline and Jim Show ended after a political rift between gay men and lesbians in the late 1970's, when lesbians realized gay men could be as sexist as straight men.

This division was wrenching for those of us who had believed we could join together in a common struggle for legal rights and protections. After all, both lesbians and gay men shared social disapproval. We were reviled, ridiculed, lost jobs and families and were refused legal rights. We were on the fringes of our faiths and often an embarrassment to our social classes. We assumed that one oppressed group would not, in turn, oppress another group, right? Wrong.

By 1978 we had to finally stop working with gay men. They had all the genetics and socialization of any men and the situation became untenable. True to their gender, they would take charge in a hierarchical way. A lesbian had to have an incredibly strong presence and a very big mouth to be able to rise to the top. Sometimes it was hard to even make the men listen.

Lesbian's and gay men's priorities often differed. In the 1970s many previously married lesbians were struggling to retain custody of their children in divorce. Although the custody issue was recognized, concern about arrests of gay men in T-rooms trumped the lesbian mothers' struggles. The rift became so wide that women dropped out of Mattachine. Some joined the younger group, Sisters of Sappho, or became associated with groups that formed at Women's Studies College. Some of the older women became associated with GROW (Gay Rights for Older Women) and some went back to the bars for their social lives. Some joined the first all women's dinner groups and consciousness raising groups.

After the Madeline and Jim show ended in the late 70s and I left Mattachine, my close men friends and I drifted apart. I felt very sad. These men had been significant in my life. They had been instrumental in my local and national political work. But our differences were overwhelming.

It was a time of great loss.

Then came the 1980s, a time of even greater loss.

In 1981, Ron, the owner of a busy gay bar, Murphy's Omega Café, died of a heretofore unknown virus that was erupting in gay communities on both the east and west coasts. The baths were putting up signs about unprotected sex. Rumor was that if the disease proliferated significantly the baths would have to close. Ron had visited the baths in New York often. He may have been Buffalo's first known casualty of the AIDS crisis.

Throughout the 1980s I would hear of one gay man after another getting sick, trying different drugs, being hospitalized for cancerous skin lesions called Capozzi's Sarcoma. Some came down with Pneumocystis Carinii, the type of pneumonia associated with AIDS. They suffered thrush. They had brain lesions. One after another they died.

In 1982, Jack, the director of a peer support group called the AIDS Alliance called me. He said he knew he was going to die soon and he asked me to sing at his funeral. He requested Amazing Grace. I said I would. He was grateful. I hung up the phone and cried. His was only the first of many funerals at which I would sing. I can hardly hear Amazing Grace without

thinking of all the friends we have all lost. Richard and Jim, Dick and Michael, Tom and Claude, and so many others who had only reached their 40s. The cocktail that would save lives had not yet been discovered.

Many of my gay men friends are no longer around. I miss their voices and their jokes and their brilliant political minds and their bravery. My chest hurts when I think of the men who worked so hard at the beginning of the gay movement but did not survive to see how far their work has taken us. I am proud of their legacy. For all of our differences and internal difficulties we were family.

21
Boots Begins

In the fall of 1977, while working on my second Masters, I was asked to again co-teach the lesbianism course, now called Women + Women. I agreed and was especially looking forward. There had been an explosion of lesbian writing since I first taught the course in 1972. Now there were significant works about lesbians by Gail Rubin, Simone DeBeauvoir, Red Jordan Arobateau, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Carol Smith-Rosenberg and many more. Gay American History by Jonathan Ned Katz—still the leading collection of documents regarding homosexuality—had been published and there was From the Closets to the Courts by Ruth Simpson. There were so many books and essays that my co-instructors Marge Maloney, Avra Michelson and I had the luxury of narrowing the course to lesbian history.

The students dove into the materials. Discussion was animated and exciting. But it became clear to the class that there must be more to lesbian history than biographies of famous, upper class women who left diaries. How to give our students a sense of the lives of working class women when they had left no written records? We decided that for the final class assignment they would tape record interviews with lesbians whose social lives had been centered in Buffalo bar culture. They would then submit the tapes and write a summary of their experience.

This meant they would talk to my friends, many of the people with whom I had socialized in the bars every weekend.

When I asked the potential interviewees, whom we eventually called narrators, for permission to be interviewed, I made it clear that most of these students had had little if any exposure to lesbian life outside of the university. The narrators were welcoming, open and forthcoming and provided intimate stories of gay community life of the 1940s and 1950s.

One woman who was a bartender described how the bars were always crowded and on almost any night you could expect a fight either over jealousy in a relationship or straight men coming in and brawling. They talked about the police coming in during the early 1950's and walking out with either a couple of bottles of booze or an envelope. They spoke about their girlfriends, about wanting to wear men's clothes all the time, and how hard it was to find a job if you were not dressed like a woman. They said that most of these bars were mixed gay men and lesbians, but as they told stories it was clear that there were separate spaces for each. The world of the 1940s and 1950s came alive on the tapes.

When I heard the tapes, I knew the material could be more than a student assignment. It couldn't simply be stored and forgotten.

I brought the tapes to my major professor, Dr. Kennedy. Liz was a Smith graduate, an anthropologist with a PhD from Cambridge and founder of Women's Studies College. She was the kind of scholar I would have expected at Columbia or the University of Chicago. I thought

we were extremely fortunate to have her but at the same time I was insecure in the face of someone with such stellar credentials. Even though I told myself that I had degrees from one of the top state schools in the country, I was intimidated by Liz's academic background. I didn't see myself as measuring up. I felt lucky to be working with her and although we were about the same age, I was like any graduate student, awed by their expert academic advisor. So I was elated that she thought the tapes merited further study.

Liz and I spent many hours listening to the interviews which were alternately amusing and sad but always full of interesting information. Liz, who was new to lesbian community, was now partnered with my old friend Bobbi. Bobbi had regaled her with stories of working class bar life and Liz felt this community was well worth documenting. These tapes were the beginning of a gold mine of data. We realized the tapes could provide a basis for further study of the rich and colorful Buffalo lesbian community of the past.

Because I had lived through some of this rich past, I was concerned that I couldn't study my own history, my own tribe, but Liz was encouraging. So together with Avra Michelson, we formed the Buffalo Women's Oral History Project. As a trained anthropologist Liz was the one familiar with interview techniques, Avra had exceptional research skills while I brought a familiarity with the narrators and a sense of both the alienation and camaraderie that existed during this period.

Together we formulated questions to bring to our interviews. We would ask such things as: When did you come out? Did you tell your family? What were the bars like then? What did people wear? How did you get along with gay men? What is the role of alcohol in the community? What was the racial mix in the bars? What kinds of jobs did you have at the time?

As far as we knew, no one had ever asked lesbians these questions before. I know no one had ever asked me.

Even though our list of questions was long, we usually began an interview with the following: Knowing that we are writing a history of Buffalo's lesbian community, what do you think is important for people to know about the past? Most of the time this began a conversation that carried us into most aspects of both bar life, home life and feelings about people's past. We often put our question lists away and allowed the history to unfold itself in our narrators' words. From stories of hilarious times to tales of regret and sadness, our tapes began to help us weave the real history of Buffalo working class bar life.

To protect our narrators, we gave all of them pseudonyms even if they were out and well known in the community. It was our opinion that you never knew what political forces might be at work and might somehow turn our narrators' words against them.

I felt extremely privileged that these women let us into their lives. Because I was a visitor in the late 1950s and actually started coming out in the 60s, the histories included people I knew. I had no idea that many of our Catholic narrators had crushes on and sometimes affairs with young nuns. I experienced pain when women talked about parental rejection. I was captivated by stories of great love and terrible break-ups, skirmishes with the police, bravery in facing both

physical and economic danger. These were women I knew, and here they were, women with a past, becoming a part of history.

My interviewing skills in the beginning, however, left something to be desired. The first interview I did was with Vic. She told about her father having her put in jail when he learned she was a lesbian. She came from a small town and he, a wealthy businessman, actually ran her out of town. During the course of the interview she mentioned people and incidents with which I was familiar. I would chime in with my own stories about those acquaintances. Finally Vic said to me, "Is this your story or mine?" I was so embarrassed. Clearly, I talked too much. I read books and articles on oral history. I learned that the narrator leads the interview and the job of the interviewer is to actively listen—a lesson I obviously needed to learn.

Another interviewing episode that, to this day I don't think tainted the process but did concern Liz, was that I had a short affair with one of the narrators. I knew it was completely against the rules and I kept it secret for a while. Finally I told Liz who was chagrined and said the interviews could never be as good if you're sleeping with the narrator. What had interested me in Sandy was having been told by Bobbi that when it came to good lovers, she was "the varsity". I had to find out what that was all about. And I did. But I never did it again and I still think her interviews were great. I guess I remain a bit defensive about it.

As I became more involved with the Buffalo Women's Oral History Project, I had to make a decision about the focus of my graduate work. When I began this program in 1974, my goals were the study of 19th Century Women, Needlework and Economics as well as Lesbian History. Because both studies were very complex I had to make a choice. I decided that the needlework was going to be around for a long time, but these lesbians were growing older and some day their stories would disappear. It was time to concentrate on the history of these women.

Liz, Avra and I wrote paper after paper on aspects of local lesbian life. Papers on what the bars were like; how personal relationships were conducted. We learned about serial monogamy as a way of committing to one woman. However, often because of social pressures, relationships that aimed towards building a home were short-lived. On the other hand, variety was intriguing and cheating was frequent. We learned about racism, alcoholism, friendships and jealousies and how women would do a great deal to maintain their relationships. We learned how women would band together to fight against straight men invading their territory and causing trouble. Yet these same women often distrusted each other when it came to lovers. It was a world of contradictions with creative solutions. Survival was paramount.

We learned about a world that was a combination of difficulty and delight. Many people still remember the old days with fondness. I know I do.

Eventually the Buffalo Women's Oral History Project became just Liz and me when Avra left to pursue graduate studies in archiving. Liz and I began attending conferences and meeting other researchers working in similar areas. We would present papers at major U.S. universities. We were always well received and our work inspired long discussions. Sometimes I felt like an interloper in this world of prestigious institutions. Inside I was still a working class

kid from Buffalo where everyone shouted across the Campus Union instead of quietly contemplating under the ivy. But I realized we were part of a growing American intellectual movement that was becoming part of an international movement of gay and lesbian sociologists, anthropologists, historians and writers who were focusing on the gay past and creating gay and lesbian history.

It was a very exciting time. Liz and I worked well together and ideas would pour out of both of us. The materials sparkled with information and the discoveries we made were groundbreaking. We would read portions of our research every year during Pride Month in June. Our presentations attracted large segments of the community. The best part was that many of our narrators would attend, both complimenting and correcting us, and vehemently arguing points of fact and experience with each other. These lively interchanges made our talks popular and moved our work along.

Liz and I were lauded by the academic world for bringing new, detailed and well researched materials to the table. We were very proud of our work and, after a short time, realized how important it was to both our narrators and to our colleagues. Eventually we discussed writing a book. In 1979, I didn't think it would take us too long to pull it together. Maybe a few years. In fact, it took well over a decade.

22
Elizabeth and the Search for Satisfaction

When Terry left me in 1974, Linda was my emotional refuge. We were together four delicious months when she came home and said, "You are wonderful but I'm not in love with you," I appreciated her honesty. She never cheated, she never made excuses. My best breakup ever. After Linda my next significant relationship was with Bobbie, a very butch young woman; a West Side street kid with a heart of gold.

Prior to Bobbie my lovers had disapproved of a femme wearing work boots, part of the costume of the new lesbian feminists. Bobbie, not intimidated by what was seen as inappropriate, gave me my first pair as a gift. Bobbie was fun but, in the end, we were not compatible. She was 23, a printer for a small industrial firm. I was 10 years older, a fulltime librarian, performer and part-time graduate student. After a year and a half I broke it off but, when Bobbie immediately became involved with a new woman, I went a little crazy with jealousy. I knew it was inappropriate. It was one of the few times in my life that I was jealous and angry. How could she go after someone else so soon? And why do I remember this jealousy so clearly when others cheated and left and I should have been jealous but instead felt hurt? I still don't know. But it passed soon and Bobbie and I remain good friends.

In 1976 I met Elizabeth in the bathroom line at Granny Goodness, a lesbian bar on Hertel Avenue on Buffalo's north side. She was gorgeous, six feet tall, green eyes, 26 years old. I was ten years older. I stood in line, waiting for an empty stall when Elizabeth, on the advice of her friend, came over, introduced herself, and asked me to dance.

When we danced, she kissed me. I was shocked and excited. I couldn't believe this beautiful woman was interested in me. I gave her my phone number.

After an interminable four-day wait, Elizabeth called. She said she didn't want to seem too aggressive. I invited her to a spaghetti dinner to be given by the Mattachine Society the following Sunday. The spaghetti was cold. The salad was wilted. We had a great time. That night, our first night together, was a bit of an adventure. Elizabeth didn't have an apartment of her own and was sleeping on a friend's couch. I couldn't invite her to my apartment because Bobbie had not yet moved out. We called a few friends and eventually spent our first night in a tiny bedroom on an even tinier army cot.

We established a relationship immediately. We were a typical U-Haul couple, moving in together very early. It was mid-February. Needless to say I was not thrilled when she told me she had to go away for the entire summer. Elizabeth had signed a contract with the United States Forest Service to survey recreation roads in Alaska. She was scheduled to leave in April.

Her absence was nerve wracking for both of us. We sent cassette tapes to one another so we could hear each other's voices and the familiar sounds around us. I recorded the cats meowing and the toilet flushing. She recorded her boots dropping on the cabin floor and the

sound of the float plane coming in to deliver goods. We even kept our passion alive on tape. I also wrote one of the best songs I had ever written, for her.

When Elizabeth returned in September I was thrilled to share my life with an educated, professional woman who was clever and beautiful. By November we had bought a house and a year later, a cabin in the woods. We planned a future. We planned forever. Forever would be ten years of very high, but also very low times, I am surprised we lasted that long. But one of the best things that happened during those years was that Madeline the city girl learned to become a Girl Scout.

Elizabeth contacted old friends when she returned from Alaska and suddenly I was surrounded by ex Girl Scouts. I had been a Girl Scout for about six months when I was twelve, long enough to earn a cooking badge. These women, all lesbians, knew it all: rope tying, fire building, finding your way in the woods. Elizabeth taught me, or as much of it as I could learn. My old friends actually saw me as a competent outdoorswoman. I could start cooking fires, identify flora, hike the forest trails and occasionally knew where I was.

Our time together, however, was also problematic. Elizabeth found jobs with surveying companies with all male crews. It was difficult for her to survive surrounded by macho guys every day. She became disillusioned and depressed. It spilled over into our relationship and we went to couples counseling. I think we chose a bad psychiatrist. Perhaps Elizabeth might disagree. Eventually, the psychiatrist decided to treat her alone and proceeded to fill her with drugs. We were often emotionally out of touch and our intimate life began to deteriorate.

One great pleasure that remained was the animals. My cats, Monster and Harriet, became our children. Then one rainy day, I was out in the backyard. Sitting in the shrubbery under one of the big trees, was a brown and white bedraggled dog, skinny and scared. We started bringing him bowls of food and water which he wouldn't touch until were back in the house. After a few days he would eat and drink while we were there. We sat on the ground and talked to him in low voices. Finally I was able to approach and pet his head. He looked so terribly sad.

On another rainy day, I went to the yard with a leash, made a slip knot and was able to drop it over his head and lead him squirming into the house. Elizabeth carried him to the basement stationary tubs. We bathed and brushed him and brought him upstairs where we installed him on a blanket in the living room. He was terrified. But, again, we sat and talked to him and brought him water and food and in time he became part of our herd. I thought naming him Trotsky would be fun since he trotted like a little horse. But the Maoists in Women's Studies thought it was politically incorrect so instead we named him Pransky. He would become my friend for 17 years.

Elizabeth and I purchased a cabin that was part of a membership land preservation corporation called Blooming Hill started by a University of Buffalo professor in the 1960s. It was a one room building with a kitchen area and a separate bath set on one and a half acres in the middle of a private woods with a stream running down the hill. We could walk the common land and roads and swim in the person-made four acre lake. Sometimes we even swam in April when

ice was still formed on the south end. On clear summer days Pransky and the cats would roam among the tall grasses and chase butterflies. It was idyllic, a place to escape the city and some of our problems. Still, the troubles continued.

I told Elizabeth that if she was not going to participate in a sex life, I would have to find someone who would. She told me to go ahead. Finally, I did. Over time I collected two part-time lovers, simultaneously. It was frustrating and exciting. One turned out to be an arch manipulator—I can find them under any rock—but Donna was sweet and kind and Elizabeth liked her. I was angry with Elizabeth and at the same time reveled in the attention I received from the two women. I was living on the edge, never knowing what would transpire. But even though Elizabeth agreed to the other women in my life, she was very sad and these relationships did nothing to help her recovery.

I then did the unthinkable. I created a band, "Madeline Davis and Friends", comprised of my lovers. The band included lead guitar and vocals, rhythm guitar, percussion, bass and a violinist who was having an affair with one of my lovers. We were musically good. We were emotionally crazy. Rehearsals were productive but fraught with tension. Early in 1983 I put everyone on stage for a concert to earn money to make a recording.

The social hall at the Unitarian church was standing room only for the concert. The entire community turned out. They not only wanted to hear the music; many wanted to see if we would explode on stage. We received resounding applause, standing ovations and requests for more.

After the concert we went to the bar. Elizabeth had decided that my days of multiples lovers were over. Factioning was apparent among the tight-knit and gossipy lesbian community. Everyone was always waiting for the next scandal and this was it. I was mostly concerned for Elizabeth who had become very fragile. We had been the topic of kitchen table conversation for months. I knew that a great deal of it was my fault. I also learned that no matter how attractive non-monogamy seemed in theory, I was not good at it.

Throughout these events, I did not consider leaving Elizabeth. She was my life. The lovers drifted on to other women and Elizabeth and I were left to face our problems, which, no matter how much we tried, turned out to be insurmountable. She was angry over the affairs. I was angry because nothing had changed. There was little intimacy and little laughter. Then one night at a concert I met Joanne.

We had known each other from the community and I had been friends with her brother. Billy had been one of the men on the battering ram at the Stonewall Tavern in New York in 1969. Joanne, an old time, tattooed butch who lived on the west side, decided to rescue me. I let her. I moved out, sold my half of the house to Elizabeth and bought my own house on the Elmwood Strip, the location of much of the lesbian community.

Joanne became the housekeeper, did some of the cooking, and was very kind to me. But her days were filled with cigarette smoking and crossword puzzles, and the high point of her evenings, going to bingo. Then she moved her sister into the spare room who smoked, read

romance novels and work word find puzzles. Meanwhile, Elizabeth became a frequent visitor. She thought there might be a chance that she and I could reunite. In less than a year I ended the relationship with Joanne, rented out the house, and moved back with Elizabeth.

We tried again. We began making love. I was paying more attention to her as she had asked. Things were looking like they might work. Until she met Chris. Rumor had it that Chris was divisive and untrustworthy. She had lived in Buffalo for years, but one weekend she went to Boston and came back with a Scottish accent. It was fake and stupid but it was compelling and she was attractive. She swept Elizabeth off her feet. Elizabeth appreciated that Chris didn't expect her to be a butch. This was a major source of discomfort for me. I wanted Elizabeth to be what she looked like, a butch. Finally Elizabeth found someone who didn't have impossible expectations. They began an affair.

Elizabeth spent more and more time at Chris's apartment, I mulled over the possibility of moving out again. Then Chris and Elizabeth came to me with a proposition. Chris would move in with Elizabeth and share her room. I would have my own room and an office. We would live in collective harmony. I was appalled. I couldn't imagine living with that fake accent for a second much less into eternity. Elizabeth tried to change my mind. We even had a counseling session with my friend Juanita. The four of us discussed the issue for about twenty minutes before Juanita said to Elizabeth, "You have to let her go." She did, and a month later I moved into Juanita's upstairs apartment with my dog, and two cats.

The relationship between Chris and Elizabeth lasted less than a year. There were to be no more do-overs for Elizabeth and me.

Elizabeth is a magnificent woman, very smart, and creative. She is a Vermonter with a dry, New England sense of humor. (Vermont Joke: A New Yorker was driving on a back road in Vermont. He stopped to ask a farmer, "Can I take this road to Burlington?" The farmer answered, "Ya might as well. Y've taken just about everthin' else.") You figure it out.

Now, we spend comfortable time together and share our lives. We count on each other in small and large ways. I have remained on good terms with many of my lovers but Elizabeth is special. We will always be family.

23
S/M

Sometimes when I talk or write about S/M (Sado-Masochism) I feel more like a commentator than a participant. But I love the world and the women of S/M. They have long been a part of my fantasy world and continue to be part of my real world. Though admittedly at seventy the sex has dropped off a bit, a matter of age, medications, energy and time.

In my late teens the concept of S/M was something I had read about—then thought about at length. Contemplating scenarios of dominance and submission were part of my yearnings, and in my imagination all acts were executed for my delight and satisfaction. Even if I were I bound and restricted, it was always with my consent. And those who dominated me serviced me, and could sense what would be pleasing without being told. But I was young, and was too afraid to venture, take hold of authority and demand my satisfaction. Then I grew up.

I'm trying to remember when my actual involvement in S/M began. It had to be after I came out as a lesbian because I never did it with men. Perhaps there was no man I trusted enough to either top me or bottom for me. I didn't trust their temperament. I know that lots of straight couples do it but there was no way I would have even considered it with a man. It was women. It was a gift I received from them and a gift I returned.

I remember when Shane told me that she had done some light B & D (Bondage and Discipline) with at least one woman before me. She told it to me as if it were a perversion she participated in to satisfy her kinky partner and shut her up. It sounded interesting and I thought I'd like to try it but I was afraid to risk Shane thinking that I, too, was a twisted pervert. That was the 1960's.

My first real exposure to the world of S/M began around the same time I was analyzing Butch-Femme in the late 1970s. At gatherings of women who wrote about and defended Butch-Femme, I also met women who did S/M. The costumes, the self-confidence, the public play, intrigued me. They appeared haughty and confident, but also able to focus on the questions of novices that were not confrontive. Top women in their leathers and boots; bottom women in revealing, clingy dresses with studded neck pieces made my skin prickle. I wanted to know more. Without any preparation or prior intent, I wanted to be a part of this life, whatever that would mean. I found these S/M women beautiful, proud, caring and responsible. I wanted to touch them and have them touch me.

In the early 1980s it happened for me.

When I say "it happened" I don't mean to imply the S/M wasn't planned or anticipated. It is much more involved than a simple, spontaneous occurrence—at least for the lesbians I know. We negotiate terms, discuss what we like and what our limits are. We tell our partners if we have physical issues like asthma or emotional issues like a history of abuse. We establish safe words and set up scenarios that appeal to both persons. I know it sounds complicated but if it's

something you both like and want, it's worth the effort. For me, S/M, or perhaps it would be more fitting for me to call my interest B/D, is about power, drama and catharsis.

Over the years I came to like bondage, both binding and being bound. My partners and I played with feathers and light whips. I don't care for very much pain but some of my partners have liked it. A couple of them have said I am not severe enough. I am good at giving orders but there is a limit to the amount of actual pain I can inflict. Perhaps I am too empathetic and since I am not a compliant pain receiver I am also not a dedicated pain giver. And I don't like inflicting pain out of anger so pissing me off is not a good way to get what you want from me. I tend to leave.

I like feeling powerful. I like being a top, a controller—and I discovered this was not a contradiction with being a femme. I have also discovered great power in what is called topping from the bottom. For many women, giving up control is extremely erotic. To be able to be subdued and handled by someone who cares about you and who derives pleasure from giving pleasure in whatever form, is very sexy. Conversely, to be the one who controls is also extremely exciting. To be able to do both is, for me, the best.

I am very private about my S/M partners; I won't be providing erotic details of any S/M encounters with them. Because sex, real, actual, hot, wet, throbbing, screaming sex is so personal, it is up to them to tell their own stories. But I've always been very public about discussing sex in general. Sometimes this got me into trouble.

My public voice as concerns sex—especially S/M—made me a local target in the late 70s and early 80s. This was a time when the second wave of the Women's Movement became fearful of lesbians and a new lesbian-feminist faction emerged. These lesbians were politically militant but, I soon found, sexually inhibited. Many seemed uncomfortable with desire. Desire is hard to control and for these lesbians control was vital.

Lesbian-feminists began to divide along sexual lines. Sex conservative lesbians would define and proclaim appropriate sexual behavior. Sex could be passionate but did not include the use of toys, working out sexual fantasies or dominance and submission, even if it was consensual. Sexual conservatives worried about women acting out what they perceived to be unhealthy sexual behaviors that might have stemmed from childhood issues like rape and other abuses.

By the late 70s the clash among lesbian feminists was heated. Arguments occurred at women studies conferences. Papers were delivered pro and con sex-conservative and sex-positive opinions. People were angry, self-righteous and defensive about their sexual preferences. Writers like Katherine McKinnon and Andrea Dworkin wrote about S/M being sick and destructive. Pat Califia and Gail Ruben wrote about S/M being a necessary part of many women's sexual expression and to attempt to limit this expression was arrogant and autocratic.

The sex-conservative lesbians also felt that being in role-defined Butch-Femme relationships was passé and detrimental to women who wanted to break out of traditional roles. I felt that they clearly did not understand the Butch-Femme dynamic.

I spent time with women at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City. We were angry that our sex conservative "sisters" were so loudly proclaiming that the way we structured our relationships was imitating the roles of the 40s and 50s that caused women to be second class citizens. They felt that butch-femme relationships made femme women passive, frilly and submissive and butch women macho and controlling. We felt that both butch-femme and S/M were manifestations of some women's sexual needs and desires and should be respected.

In 1981 I attended a workshop on S/M at the Michigan Women's Music Festival. The festival itself provides a venue in which women can express freedom in many ways, including sexual. The leather women who attended were particularly free. I became enthralled with bare breasted women in body harnesses, tattoos, piercings and ardently passionate faces. I must have fallen in love a dozen times during that workshop and subsequent S/M dyke gatherings during the week. My partner and I went right home and practiced. Although it never became the dominant way in which we had sex, it was interesting enough to try and try again and, up to our level of curiosity, to get it right.

Then in 1982 at a conference called The Feminist and the Scholar IX at Barnard College, I actually met women in an academic setting who were not only defending Butch-Femme roles and relationships but also other kinds of sexual interchange including S/M.

In the 1980s my interest in S/M would continue to play out not only in the bedroom but at workshops and conferences. There were whipping demonstrations, classes on pain thresholds and how to recognize what too much was. Lectures on toys: whips, dildos, handcuffs, etc. I spoke and read erotic poetry at a meeting of LSM, The Lesbian Sex Mafia.

Founded in 1981, the LSM is an information and support group in New York City for lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and transsexual women. It is one of the oldest women's BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism) groups in the U.S. It supports confidentiality, safety and a woman's right to explore her sexuality. At LSM parties I was thrilled that my poetry was appreciated. I was welcomed into the S/M sisterhood and felt not only appreciated but desired.

In Toronto and Seattle I attended play parties. These were private gatherings, usually in large loft space, in which women actually had public sex. The first time I attended, I felt like such a novice. Women were chained to walls, hung in slings, bent over cross bars. Women in beautiful, tight-fitting leather and rubber costumes were whipped and fucked, pierced and tattooed, led by leashes and pushed to their knees to service their tops. Tops handled whips and paddles; reddened buttocks and applied harnesses. I was fascinated by the costuming, the cockiness, the conglomeration of beautiful, outrageous women all gathered in one place concentrating fully on sex and its myriad manifestations.

In 1989 I was a judge in the International Ms. Leather Contest in San Francisco. Women were dressed in exquisite leather garb, mostly black but also red, vivid blues and purples. There were kits on safe sex and varieties of S/M activities were put on every evening. Interviews were held. We voted for a big, luscious blonde for Ms. International Leather. It was an honor to be part of a very exciting gathering. I wrote and spoke about the experience when I returned to

Buffalo to the fascination of our local lesbian community.

I thought, and still think that sexually conservative lesbians who try to dictate appropriate lesbian sex are oppressors. They are unable to allow women the right to play out who they are and to explore the fullness of their sexuality. They prefer that we work out our "perverted" desires in therapy but not in our erotic lives. They are uptight and judgmental. Their definition of pleasure is narrow and dictatorial and I don't like them.

My exploration of S/M has been exuberant and fascinating. In those early days it was difficult for me to reconcile being femme which, when I came out, I had equated with passive or reactive, with being top, which is assertive and active. Although I made attempts at bottoming, assuming that one can only be a good top if one is willing to experience the position of the other, I was not altogether successful.

For a short time I became involved with a woman who claimed to be a top. I wanted to explore real bottoming. She lived ninety miles from Buffalo and for about six weeks the physical experience was a delight. The emotional experience collapsed with a resounding thud. She was jealous and possessive. She wanted to be in charge not only in the bedroom but out on the streets. I believe she wanted a girlfriend who would look at her adoringly all of the time and "yes" her to death. All it did was piss me off. I left. I learned from that relationship that I would always be a femme but that being a bottom, giving up all control, makes me anxious and gives me stomach aches.

What I most love about S/M is the drama, the costume, the scenario, played to its ultimate emotional intensity. It is transcendent to take someone to the brink and bring them back with love and caring. The brink can be fear, pain, having someone do something they would not ordinarily acquiesce to. Giving someone the permission to let go and fulfill needs they would never even admit to, even to themselves. It is the great sexual and emotional breaking and healing that comes from doing it with someone you trust, and who, in turn, trusts you. And it is fun, a lot of fun.

At this point, I have said all I can say about S/M. I think I am getting bored talking it to death. Doing S/M is obviously different from writing about it. Writing about it makes me frustrated because I just sit here analyzing something that is so physically and emotionally vital. It makes me want to get up and do something. And perhaps I shall.

24
My Sister's Story

It's harder writing about my sister Sheila than anyone else. Probably because she would prefer not being written about. She is very private. I am very public. Although alike in many ways, we are drastically different in others.

I used to think we were the same person or simply extensions of each other and one day she would realize it and stop being irritated by my assumptions. Turns out, she was right. It has taken me over 60 years to figure out where I end and Sheila begins. It is also a source of frustration because the lines are ever changing. The complexity of sisters.

I love my sister. I love her more than anybody except maybe Wendy. Sometimes I think I love the dog more than either but that's another discussion. I truly adore my sister and get furiously upset when she is hurt. It is my job to protect her even though she is 67 and a woman of the world. She is still younger and more vulnerable. Perhaps this is something I prefer to believe rather than an objective truth.

When mother brought Sheila home from the hospital I thought she was for me. They said she was my baby sister and so I assumed she was what they said, mine. My three-year-old hands touched her little hands and cheeks and made her laugh. I followed mother around when she moved her or changed her. Because our doctor lived next door, I got to go to all the visits. Her bassinette and then crib were in my room, now our room. The first word she ever said was "Ma-a-an," an early version of Madeline. Obviously, Sheila was mine.

When my sister was a little over a year old, she developed terrible ear infections. She would cry all night and I would cry with her. My parents would lay blankets and a white sheet on the dining room table so that Dr. Mary could lance her ears and let the infection drain. It was a terrifying ordeal. I would stand against the dining room wall near the kitchen doorway squeezing my grandmother's hand as Sheila screamed. I kept crying, "They're hurting my baby. They should stop." Grandma said the baby was sick and they were trying to make her better. After they fixed her ears she would sleep through the night for a while, but sometimes it would start over and they'd have to do it again. I worried about her all the time.

When she was about seven Sheila contracted rheumatic fever. Everyone was scared she would die. She was on medication that she said tasted awful and the doctor came a lot. They kept her in bed for almost a year. After that mother wouldn't let her do anything physical. She didn't believe in building your body back up. Mother's philosophy was that you didn't use up your energy. Sheila was never allowed to go swimming. Even today, after years of swimming lessons, Sheila is afraid of deep water. And both of us are afraid of using up our energy.

My sister was also a brat. She was willful and stubborn and was not the "good girl" that I had been. She was clever and "had a pisk (mouth) on her," meaning she talked back. I envied my little sister's feistiness and often wished I'd had the nerve to talk back when I wasn't pleased

with something.

People would say that I was the smart child and Sheila the pretty one. I lay this definition at our mother's doorstep. She was very clear about the worth of each of her daughters. I was bright and talented and marriage wasn't that important. Instead, I should "be something". Mother had no sympathy for my feelings of being an unattractive, fat outsider.

She saw Sheila in a different light, and as a youngster I didn't realize how unfair this light was. I never stopped to consider whether mother's opinion was realistic. The message we received (and what we believed): Madeline, smart but ugly. She should have a profession. Sheila, pretty but dumb. She should find a husband. Sheila recently told me that what she really wanted was to become a valued daughter just like her older sister. She just didn't know how.

Sheila was bright and received good grades, but mother dismissed her intelligence and abilities and told her clearly that she should look forward to marriage and children. She should not concern herself with a career because she probably wouldn't be successful. Mother told her to take home economics so she would have something to fall back on. The guidance counselor told her to register at Bryant & Stratton Secretarial School. I can't imagine how it must have felt to live surrounded by those you trusted telling you that you were incapable and unworthy of doing anything besides wedding a man.

I think Sheila loved me even when she wanted to get away from me. I was 17, we had moved to Kenmore and, since I only had one year of high school left, I continued at Bennett High in the city. Sheila was 14, and began attending Junior High in the suburbs. Her high school, Kenmore Senior High (now Kenmore West) was very different from Bennett. There was not a large Jewish student population in the late 50s because; rumor has it that Kenmore had an unspoken covenant forbidding Jews and African Americans. Sheila said it was common to hear anti-Semitic epithets yelled in her high school hallways. It was hard for a little, dark haired Jewish girl to find acceptance in a school full of tall, slim, straight-haired, blond Christians. Having a fat, beatnik barfly older sister didn't make life easier.

The more I became enveloped in the world of artists and writers, both pseudo and real, left wing politics and radical social groups, the more Sheila tried to distance herself, not engage in discussion, and not confide in me about her life. It left me confused and hurt. She had been my baby, the one I needed to protect. And now she didn't need my protection and certainly didn't want it. She was becoming her own person and I was supposed to get out of the way. It was a very painful time and clearly the end of our childhood.

We spoke about that time period recently. She said I embarrassed her because I was promiscuous. I tried to defend myself by insisting that I didn't really sleep with very many people. She said that because of the crowd I ran with I had the reputation of having an active sex life. She found it shameful. She didn't want to talk about it then, or now. She wants to forget it and move on. As always, I want to talk it to death and figure out how to make it better.

I never told her back then but I was jealous of Sheila. She dated when she was in high school. I never had a date until college. Nice Jewish boys liked her. They avoided me.

Although rivalry and jealousy often happens between sisters close in age, I think our mother also set us up not to like each other. The issues of who was pretty and who was smart kept us at odds. It's hard to say why mother would have done this. Perhaps she was simply jealous that Sheila and I might have a relationship apart from her.

Admittedly, for a time, although I loved my sister, I didn't like her. Her disapproval and withdrawal was very upsetting. I disapproved that she ironed her hair just because everyone seemed to have straight hair. I was terribly hurt that the first boy I lived with confessed to me that he desired my sister, even though she had no knowledge of it. I didn't like it that my sister didn't want her in-laws to know that I was a lesbian. I didn't like that when Sheila married, my partner Shane wasn't allowed to attend and had to drive around town while my mother and I were at the reception. I also didn't know that this plan was our mother's idea.

Sheila, the pretty one, did get married. But, she also went to college, earned a doctorate and accepted a position on the faculty at University of California at Long Beach. In 1979, Sheila was recruited by Ohio State University to become the first academic in the country to have a joint appointment between Women's Studies and the School of Business. I didn't know until recently that, during one of the many interviews for the job, she told the Women's Studies group that "Madeline Davis is my sister." Apparently, every woman there was thrilled. She became a celebrity (or a celebrity's sister).

She took the job in Ohio and established a long distance relationship with her husband, who continued to live in California. In early summer of 1980 Sheila's husband flew to Columbus and they packed her car, ready to drive to California to spend the summer together. As they closed the trunk he said, "I have to talk to you." Ominous words. They went inside and sat. He admitted to a yearlong affair. Although she was devastated, Sheila was ready to recommit if he broke off the affair. Ultimately, he would not end it and my sister's marriage was over.

When Sheila returned to Columbus she was so traumatized she couldn't go into the room in which her husband had opened Pandora's Box and made his admission of infidelity. Because of my involvement with Wicca, she asked me to perform a house cleansing to eradicate any essence of her ex from the premises. I was happy to oblige; overjoyed that my sister needed me and asked for my help.

I traveled to Columbus on a weekend in the spring of 1981. Sheila gathered her women friends together to participate in the cleansing. We burned incense and chanted for purification and healing. We carried candles around the house to symbolically drive out the darkness and sadness of the prior relationship and, with ritual, sealed the windows and doors against negative spirits. When the ceremony was complete we celebrated with the requisite potluck. It was wonderful to establish a safe space where Sheila could start over.

After the house cleansing, it took a while for Sheila to regain her footing. She tried to become interested in men again but found that they were too self-centered and presumptuous about intimacy and she just didn't want the hassle.

Sheila has always insisted that although I was a lesbian first, she was a feminist before me. She's right. She had been part of the Women's Movement in Ithaca, NY since 1968. She volunteered at the Ithaca Women's Health Center and for a number of actions and committees. Later, for many years, she was active in the Women's Movement in Columbus, Ohio. She also volunteered at Fan the Flames, the bookstore formed by the Woman's Action Collective.

In 1981 Sheila told me that she was involved with a woman. They had been together a number of months before she finally said anything. Perhaps she didn't want to make an announcement about something that she was not sure was going to last. I was thrilled. I sighed with relief. It didn't matter who the woman was. It didn't matter whether it would be a long-term relationship or not. She was with a woman and now I could stop worrying about her. I believe Sheila had been emotionally abused by her husband. I was often upset and couldn't tolerate someone, particularly a man, hurting her. They had injured me badly and I was defensive about men hurting my sister. Now, I was elated. She was going to live in a world in which she was an equal and was truly appreciated and loved. I felt secure knowing this would be so much better for her than her straight life. After all, it had been better for me.

Of course, it was presumptuous of me to think that because I liked being a lesbian that she would like it as well. But as it turned out, she did fall in love with this first woman and, although their relationship differs from the one I have with Wendy, I believe they are truly committed and complement each other well. I have been with her through some of the emotional ups and downs of her relationship. I have alternately felt concerned that she may have made the wrong choice and happy to know that she has made the right one. It has taken me many years to understand that Sheila and I have different needs and tastes and desires and that she finds fulfillment in her own way, not mine.

I am no longer the little girl who can try to save the baby from pain. At 70 years of age I think I may have finally caught on: we are not the same person. Sheila is not my child. She is my sister and my best friend and she holds a unique place in my heart.

25
Sisters In Spirit

I am twelve years old and in the seventh grade and in love for the first time. He says hi when we see each other outside the school and in hallways but I know he's looking right through me. I wish he were my boyfriend. I've never had a boyfriend. Instead he's in love with my best friend. Maybe that's why I am smitten. I don't know. All I know is that I want him to be mine.

In the evening in the basement playroom I take out a sheet of drawing paper and with a purple crayon carefully draw a pentagram and place it in the middle of the floor. I take a white candle and carve his name in it. I place the candle in a glass holder in the center of the drawing and light it. I hope nobody upstairs smells it and comes looking for me. I call upon the gods and goddesses I have read about. I ask them to help me. I ask that he like me. I ask that he invite me to something—anything—even a walk home from school. I make up an incantation and sing it softly. The candle burns down an inch. I worry that someone will call my name and want to know what I am doing. I hurry to finish the song. I squeeze my eyes shut and pray that the gods and goddesses have heard me.

I blow out the candle, gather up the paper, crayon, candle and holder and put them into a paper bag. I carry the bag upstairs to the bedroom I share with my little sister and hide it in my dresser drawer. I hope my ritual will work. It doesn't. I still hope. I continue to conduct rituals. For 58 years.

My connection to Wicca began at age 12 with curiosity, a lot of reading about Witchcraft and attempts at ritual. It was 1952. Feminist Wicca, the coven and my elevation to High Priestess were decades away.

For those unfamiliar, Wicca and Witchcraft, also called "The Craft" can be the same or different depending on how the practice is used. Wicca is an earth religion. Its practice has many forms, the most familiar of which in the United States is Celtic Wicca. However "The Craft" has existed at least since Babylonian times and today practitioners may call upon elements of many cultures in their beliefs and rituals. I still have a paper I wrote for an English class when I was 15 on the history of Witchcraft in England. It was during this period that I began regularly burning candles, writing prayers and spells and considering the possibility that mainstream religions might not be the only ways to tap into the spirit of the universe.

When I was young Witchcraft was a way for me to feel in control my environment. If I said the words often enough, maybe I'd get thin and be pretty. If I scratched the spell into a candle, maybe he would love me. In the beginning, Witchcraft and later, Wicca, were a refuge from helplessness.

As I grew older I was careful to learn the difference between Black and White magic; between religious practice that would fulfill a need for controlling my life and the desire to control others for my benefit. I learned, and still believe the Rule of Three: If you send

something out into the universe it will return to you Threefold. So watch out what you wish for.

I practiced as a Solitary, a Wiccan who does not belong to a group, on and off until 1985. During that time I also experimented with Nichiren Buddhism and the Tao. I did not explore Christianity, although I did, on occasion, attend services at our local Unitarian Church. I am a Jew. Even practicing The Craft I remain a Jew. My mother said, "Once a Jew, always a Jew." I know her mother said the same and I'm sure my entire lineage has affirmed this. Embracing Wicca never changed the fact that I am Jewish. When Wendy and I were to be married at our temple, I told the rabbi that I was practicing Wicca. He smiled and said it was not a problem. I have, since that time, called myself a "Jewitch".

Spiderwoman Coven came at a perfect time for me. I was mourning the demise of a ten-year relationship with Elizabeth that was failing for the second time. My emotions were in disarray. I had trouble concentrating. I cried often. To get through the days, I chose Spiderwoman, or, perhaps, it chose me.

Anne Sterling and I had been friends since she was 19 and I was 25. When I returned from California after my divorce, I worked at Lockwood Library at the University. Annie worked there as well. We have shared a lifetime of wonder and beauty and gossip and hilarity and loss and pain. She was there when my mom died. I was there when her mom died. I guess she's one of perhaps three friends I would call "closest". Annie is beautiful and weird. Once she went up on a stage and punched George Lincoln Rockwell (American Nazi Party) in the stomach. Her mom ran for Lt. Governor of New York representing the U.S. Labor Party. Annie wears bright colors and silk pantaloons and flowing shirts and turquoise jewelry. I love Annie. In the 1980s Annie belonged to a small Wiccan group with her oldest friend Mark. She and I had long talks about feminist Wicca and creating an all women's group. We were both ready.

In the early 1980s I also met Mary. She worked at the Central Library where I was head of Preservation. We had long talks. I hired her in my department; our talks got even longer. Mary lived in a very old farmhouse in the town of Cherry Creek, about 40 miles from Buffalo. She and her partner Ken had dogs and cats and were both artists. She thought an all women's spiritual group might be just what she needed.

Donata was already Wiccan. She belonged to a traditional Gardnerian (a Celtic form) coven that was mixed, men and women. She had a house full of icons and crystals and plates and bowls with stars on them. She had drawings of the Goddess and wands and cups everywhere. She knew all the traditional rituals and was way ahead of us. Donata also said she was ready for a women's group.

One evening in the fall of 1986 the four of us set up a small altar in the middle of my living room. We lit candles and called the quarters invoking the spirits of the four directions. We welcomed the Goddess into our lives as we cast a circle. Our coven was born.

Sharon called me at the library one day and asked to interview me for a news article on my political activities. We had lunch. Then we had more lunches. We talked about Wicca and how it made sense for women of spirit. It put us in touch with the elements in the universe and

the elements inside of ourselves: air, fire, water, earth. It was both exotic and familiar. She said her partner Lynn had also been interested in a religion that put women first. They wanted to do something, not just talk about it. They were invited to the next circle.

Kate and Marilyn had been good friends with Annie and I also knew them for many years through the women's community. They had been interested in Goddess religions and when Annie told them we were beginning to learn to practice The Craft they were eager to join us. Our second circle included eight women. We named our Coven Spiderwoman after the Native American myth. As the myth goes, Spider Woman was responsible for creating the universe. She spun the four directions. She created the sun, moon and stars to light the world. She created the earth and gave birth to all living creatures by molding them out of clay and breathing life into them. It was important to us to use as our touchstone, a creation myth centered in a female deity that was native to the country in which we lived.

Our gatherings used both established ritual and original practices. We followed the customs described in books by Starhawk, a nationally known Wiccan priestess, Margo Adler who wrote on the history of goddess centered religion and Z. Budapest, an activist Wiccan from California. Many authors influenced our practice.

Our functions were both formal and casual. We dressed in flowing robes. We brought our own athames (ritual knives), cups, crystals and goddess symbols. We set up our altar with candles, flowers, fruit, stones and all of the requisite implements described in our books on Wicca. We also brought drums, bells, guitars and other smaller instruments to accompany the chants and songs, many of which we wrote. We blessed the salt and the water. We called each other by our adopted Wiccan names. We chanted and prayed. We raised power. I can't tell you in words what that means but it made me feel like the pieces of me that had been scattered because of disappointment, grief, loss and regret were coming back together and making me whole again. I regained control of my life with the help of these women. We believed in our practice and we believed in each other's strength.

Our coven met every month as close to the full moon as we could. We also met on the dates of the Wiccan Sabbats or days of celebration. We became close and we supported each other with ritual and friendship.

We were together for a number of years before we considered conducting ceremonies that would grant us the title and responsibilities of High Priestess. A High Priest or Priestess is recognized as having studied literature and ritual and having displayed exceptional involvement in the good of the group. It is the group that consecrates someone as High Priest or Priestess. After we had been together for seven years as a coven, we made the decision to consecrate each other as leaders.

We are sworn to hold secret the rituals used that evening. By the end of the ceremony, we each held the rank of High Priestesses of our Dianic (women centered) coven, Spiderwoman. The ceremony was ethereal and elegant. We came away with a renewed sense of self confidence and feeling we would teach future Dianic Wiccans, which we have done.

Over time we became known in the gay and women's communities. We were called upon to give talks, lead workshops, lead discussion groups and teach chanting for the purpose of raising spirit. Through work and blessing we learned to value our positions as High Priestesses and led rituals for those outside the group. I performed two handfastings, the pagan equivalent of marriage ceremonies. The ritual binds two persons together in the presence of members of a pagan or Wiccan circle and in the presence of the Goddess. And all of us worked in the community to do spiritual healing. I also performed house cleansings, and was honored to perform a cleansing for my sister after her divorce and later after my brother died.

My involvement in Wicca came at a time when the Women's Movement had broadened beyond the purely political and had taken on both a social and a spiritual component. My women friends, both straight and gay, were not at all surprised at my involvement in The Craft and membership in a coven. Since coven members became well known in the community, we found that many people were curious. We experienced almost no negativity. The only person who gave us a hard time was a radio interviewer who had us on the show around Halloween. He wanted gory details of naked lesbian witches casting spells under the moonlight and when we had none to share he became just short of abusive. I think we were too boring for his aims.

As time went on and lives evolved we began to meet less often. A couple of our members adopted children who demanded time and energy. I moved home to take care of my mother who could no longer live alone. Other relationships changed and required more attention. Some of our members drifted into other spiritual groups.

In August of 1995 the Coven reconvened for a very special occasion. Wendy and I had already had our ceremony of Kiddushin, the Jewish blessing of our union, in July. In August, we traveled to a circle in the woods on Mary's land to celebrate a Handfasting. Our coven was there as were members of other local covens and invited guests. Marilyn, the senior member of our group led the ritual which was beautiful and spiritual. We were led together to the four directions and our hands were bound with silk cord and blessed by those in attendance. We shared a cup of wine with each other and poured a libation on the altar in honor of our joining. After the ceremony we celebrated with food and drink.

Spiderwoman has not met for over 12 years. I miss our gatherings. They added a dimension to my life that made me feed grounded and clear headed. I also miss the women. Sometimes we see each other on the street, at parties, in the grocery store. We talk about plans to get together. We promise to call and set a date. I feel sad that we don't follow through. Maybe the life of Spiderwoman Coven is simply past and I need to follow other aspects of my spiritual life. But I do think about our gatherings and there is an empty space.

26
Moving in with Mother

1991 was not a very good year. I was frustrated with my library career. I had risen to the highest unionized level as a department head and I expected to become a real book preservationist. Instead I became middle management and I hated it. It was no longer librarianship. It was employee supervision, the wrong job for me. In addition, Liz Kennedy and I were in our 12th difficult year of writing a book together on Buffalo's lesbian community. My lover relationship with Leslie had gone into low gear. And then there's moving in with mother—more on that a little later.

Leslie and I had been together since 1987. I met her after I had broken up with Olga with whom I began a tempestuous relationship post-Elizabeth at the end of 1986. Olga was adorable and bright and always busy, working, gardening, fixing up her Victorian house but also the most jealous lover I ever had. I made a trip to Seattle to an S/M conference and was assigned a "slave", a sweet woman who brought me breakfast, saw to my needs. I never had sex with her. When I returned to Buffalo Olga accused me of cheating on her with my slave. I protested vehemently. She didn't believe me. Eventually Olga left me. Her reason: I was too fat.

I met Leslie in a gay bar a few months later. Leslie was a New Jersey girl who was somewhat younger than I. She worked at a publishing house and got off at midnight. Every night she would show up at 12:30 a.m. and we would make love. After pillow talk she would go home to her ex-lover/ roommate. Although she soon left her job and our midnight trysts ended, we had begun a relationship that would last for six years.

The relationship was very successful for quite a while. We were intellectually compatible. We had similar senses of humor. We both loved cats. We were incessant readers and she had been of great help reading and criticizing my work for Boots of Leather. And we shared an eroticism that often drove me to tears. I don't think I ever told her how different sex was with her. Perhaps she thought I was the same with everyone but it was different. I also loved her.

With Leslie I let my guard down and gave up protecting myself. She was intuitive about sexuality and had the talent for acute focus. I was also in my early 40s and at the peak of my abilities to give and receive. But Leslie was able to touch me where no one had touched me since Shane. I trusted her enough to become vulnerable again.

But then our relationship started waning. I must admit to not paying much attention. Between hating my job, finishing the book with Liz, in 1991 I made a much dreaded change in my life—at 50 years of age I moved in with my mother.

Mother and I had lived apart for most of my adult life. As it should be. Children grow up and move out. Then, in November of 1990, she blacked out behind the wheel and hit three parked cars. She had just turned 76. The police found her fairly lucid but slow to respond. In her car trunk were bags of chocolates from Oliver's candy shop in Batavia, a town just east of

Buffalo. She was driving home from a candy run at one of her favorite stores. Although the accident did not cause her any major injuries, the hospital discovered that once again, she was evincing symptoms of heart disease.

Mother had had a triple bypass in 1988. After the surgery my sister Sheila stayed with her for two weeks while Liz and I went to a pre-planned conference on research on homosexuality at the University of Amsterdam and a previously scheduled week after that in Spain. I was truly grateful to Sheila for stepping up. Mother did very well after the bypass. We thought her health problems had been solved.

When mother came home from the hospital after the car crash in 1990, she needed constant care. I had a rental hospital bed and portable commode installed in her living room. I took vacation time from work, brought my dog, Pransky, and for two weeks slept on the sofa seat cushions arranged on the floor next to her bed so I could help her to the commode in the middle of the night. When I returned to work, I hired friends to come to the house during the day. After work I went back to my apartment to take care of the cats and then stayed the night with mother.

It became clear to me after a month on this schedule that I would have to give up my apartment and move home to become a caregiver. My sister and brother were not available. Both had left Buffalo many years before. Sheila was living in Ohio with her partner and my brother Mark in California with his wife and daughter. I was in Buffalo and in a relationship with Leslie, a woman with whom I did not live. The oldest child was available.

I believed it was traditional that the oldest child takes care of aging parents, especially if that child was a girl and most especially if she was a lesbian. It was often assumed that lesbians had no real lives; their partners are not spouses so they don't really count, and they are around to care for parents when the parents get old and sick. I know many lesbians who have taken responsibility for elderly, ill parents for a long time before mom or dad had to go to a nursing facility. Parents with sons or straight daughters with families went to assisted living and nursing homes much earlier.

I gave notice to my landlady who had been a close friend and said she sympathized. Then the next day she said she could get much more for the apartment and was worried about finding a new tenant in the winter so she was raising my rent $300 and asking me to sign a six month lease. I was stunned. This was clearly not sympathy. I knew my mother was not her problem but it felt like she had punched me in the stomach. I talked her down to a $100 rent raise and promised to pay rent for at least the next four months. Even though she agreed to my new terms our relationship was permanently altered. She was the first casualty of my moving "home".

Moving into my mother's house in Kenmore was a huge project. I had only lived there from age 17 to age 19, and then again for a couple of months after my divorce in 1965 when I was 25. It was a house I had not grown up in and never particularly cared for. I was also returning to look after a woman who had always been independent. Now, I was the child who became the caretaker. Neither of us was prepared for this. I didn't anticipate just how awful it would become. But, since my mother refused to go into a nursing home and I wouldn't force the

issue, there was no one else to take care of her but me. Everyone assumed, as did I, that it was my job.

My mother transferred ownership of the house to me and I took out a small mortgage to pay for the construction of a first floor bedroom and accessible bath at the rear of the house so she wouldn't have to climb stairs. When it was completed her only comment was the room was too small. I settled in on the second floor.

I hired aides to come every day to take her to lunch and accompany her on little shopping trips for entertainment while I was at work. I didn't think of taking care of my mother as giving up my life but my life did become more complicated. I did the major shopping, laundry, cooking and cleaning. I continued to work fulltime, sing on the weekends and write and edit with Liz in between.

As if I didn't have enough to do, in 1991, I caught the acting bug once more and became involved with a gay theater company, Buffalo United Artists.

Even though I consider myself predominately a singer, I've also enjoyed acting since playing Lampito in an experimental college production of Aristophanes' Lysistrata. Dressed in the gold leather costume of a Greek general I wore lots of femmy make up and spoke in a southern accent. It was great fun. After returning to Buffalo in 1965, I played a plain looking college girl coerced into an affair with a young man by her pretty girlfriend in local playwright Jerry Marquette's "Let's Not and Say We Did." In my first professional review the newspaper critic, Bob Sokolsky called my performance a "moving portrayal." Nice words to read not long after Allen said he didn't want to be married anymore. There it was in a newspaper; I was at least competent.

I would act again in 1973 when I co-directed and played Gertrude Stein in a performance of Al Carmine's musical production, The Faggot, held at Mattachine's Gay Community Center. I sang, with Alice B. Toklas, the romantic duet "Ordinary Things". The entire cast danced and sang and the packed audience howled and applauded. Still, I considered myself a singer and it would be almost 20 years before I would act again.

In 1991, I was cast in the role of Sue, a wealthy 40 year old involved with a flighty 20-year-old flirt in the Buffalo United Artists production of Last Summer at Bluefish Cove. This is also where I also met Margaret Smith, a graduate of the Theater Department at Buffalo State College. Margaret assistant directed the play. I was impressed with her skills and when she went on to produce lesbian variety shows called Dykes Do Drag; I performed in two of the shows as a singer, a drummer with my group Black Triangle and in one as MC in Perry Mason drag.

I tried to keep busy with my own life and after six months living with my mother I was relieved when her condition began to improve. She moved into her new bedroom and started making her own breakfast and lunch. She even made our dinner on occasion. I took her to temple. I took her to the theater and musical events. I viewed it as her getting some of her life back. I thought I would also get mine. I didn't realize that she was simply assuming control of her household again. That included control of her own life and environment and as much of mine

as she could manage. After all, she was the mother.

Even after her health had improved mother insisted that the aides continue to come and take her out. She loved chatting with the aides and they liked her. Being charming with strangers was typical Harriet behavior. Being bitchy with me was as well. The aides became her daytime social life. Essentially, we were paying for company.

Mother also came to consider my friends, her friends. Although she had had contact with her cousin and a couple of ladies she had worked with, she neglected these relationships and replaced them with mine. It was unsettling. Tensions began to build. I became the focus of her wrath. She struck out at unexpected moments. She would be warm and communicative and then suddenly bitchy and smoldering. Tensions increased as I continued taking care of both her life and mine.

With all that was going on in my life, I was not spending much energy on Leslie. Looking back I realize that I provided her with the time, space and reason to eventually become involved with someone else. The second casualty of my moving home.

27
A Door Closes; a Window Opens

In the spring of 1993, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: the history of a lesbian community was published. It was 14-year journey and the stress from all those years of co-authoring a rigorously researched 434 page book had taken its toll on both me and Liz Kennedy. We had begun with high hopes and enthusiasm but as the years went on we were beset with problems. A third member of our research team dropped out. Writing became more arduous and our personal and work lives increasingly demanding. More than once, Liz and I sought counseling to be able to continue our intellectual "marriage". But in the end, the book we produced was worth it and continues to this day to make us proud.

Boots garnered excellent reviews in the New York Times, The Boston Globe and other national presses, won national prizes, and is still used today in gender studies, history, anthropology and social science classes across the country. In our continuing spirit of activism, when the paperback rights were sold to Penguin for a substantial sum, we donated most of the money to fund EAGLES, a support group for older gays and lesbians.

When the book came out in early 1993, our publisher, Routledge, sponsored a small tour. It was extremely stressful. Although people loved the book and applauded our presentations, the difficulties of our final years left Liz and me drained and edgy with each other. It had simply taken too much out of me and I was lurching towards depression.

It didn't help that I was still living with my mother. And my becoming a highly-praised author didn't make that relationship any easier. I'm certain she bragged to anyone who would listen that she was the mother of an author but what I remember most is giving her a copy and her contending, casually, that she could have written it. She was not joking, nor did she ever read the book.

It was also during the book tour that I realized Leslie was cheating on me.

One evening in the early summer of 1993, Leslie had attended a performance of poetry readings and films. She was going to call when she returned home. The phone never rang. I called Leslie. There was no answer. I knew Margaret had been at the performance and so I called and asked her if she had seen Leslie. She said she had but that Leslie said she was going home. She asked if I'd like her to call Leslie. It was absurd. Why would Leslie answer her ring and not mine? Leslie didn't have caller ID and all rings sound alike. It was clear to me that Leslie was with Margaret. I said it wouldn't be necessary, thanked her and hung up. Within ten minutes Leslie called saying she had been driving around, just thinking. She had never done such a thing in our six years together. I knew Leslie was lying.

When I first worked with Margaret in the Dykes Do Drag lesbian variety show, I noticed a flirtation between her and Leslie. I also noticed that Margaret flirted with lots of people. It just seemed her way and I even admired her magnetism. But I felt secure with Leslie and ignored it.

Now I knew that what had been a flirtation had become more serious. But, I didn't ask Leslie. Even though I don't flinch when it comes to a political battle I dislike personal conflict. I'd rather call it quits, and leave, than engage in a confrontation. So I didn't reveal my suspicions. I dealt with Leslie in the same way I had learned to deal with my mother. Keep quiet, buckle down and stay busy with studies and outside interests and activities—or leave. I remained silent and Leslie and I stayed together.

So in retrospect it's not surprising that a month or so later, when Margaret gathered together a group of about 10 lesbians interested in taking acting lessons, I was happy to be asked. I thought we were fortunate to take classes from Lorna Hill, the founder of Ujima Theater Company, Buffalo's only theater company dedicated to the production of plays by African American playwrights. Lorna, a pro-gay straight woman was a friend of Margaret's. A fine director with high standards, Lorna worked us rigorously.

I loved the acting classes. They kept me occupied and my focus off of Leslie and my mother. Then my house of cards started to tumble when I had a severe asthma attack in December of 1993. I have had a history of asthma since I was in my twenties and severe attacks have been few but extreme.

Leslie and Elizabeth checked me into Buffalo General Hospital. I was admitted for four days of treatment with oxygen and medications. Leslie never visited. We phoned each other but there was always some reason she couldn't come to the hospital. She was ill, tired or busy. It made me sad and I knew I had to confront her. After I was released, I told her I knew about the affair with Margaret. She finally admitted it.

I called an end to our relationship but I continued acting. Lorna felt we were good enough to put on at least an amateur production and I didn't want to miss it. I also was also too proud to leave the troop. I suspected that, because Margaret was close to many of the members that they probably knew about the affair. But I was certainly not going to let anyone know that I was in pain. It was probably a romanticized notion but I was determined to make sure that I was perceived as dedicated to the performance above all.

It was actually crap. I was not only devastated by losing Leslie, I was stunned that Margaret, a director to whom I gave my best work, would involve herself with my lover. Except for the one instance when a lover gave me permission to see others, I adhered to the rule that you wait until someone is free before beginning an affair. I suppose, at my age, that was pretty naïve. But, in fact, the show did go on. And so did I.

I made a call to Toronto to a woman I knew could help me get over my broken heart. She arrived in Buffalo within 24 hours and we began a tempestuous six week, distracting, S/M affair. It only lasted six weeks partially because of the travel time and also because she was becoming a pain in the ass. She wanted a master/slave relationship outside of the bedroom and I wasn't up for subverting my everyday life to someone else's. After a very short time I became less available.

Meanwhile the acting class performed three versions of Sarah Dreher's one-act comedy,

This Brooding Sky. In one version I played the narrator. Supposedly reading a mystery novel, I recounted the story in a cardboard prop bathtub with my bra straps pulled down, pretending to be naked. The audience (and I) thought it, and the story, were hilarious.

Within a week of my gradual separation from the constant Canadian, I agreed to a date with Wendy Smiley. This would be our second date. The first, 20 years earlier, when I was 34 and Wendy was 20, was a charming walk in the park. I thought she was too young for me and I sent her on her way. But, after two decades, I agreed to dinner on April Fools Day. Wendy made me laugh. Not much was making me laugh those days. She was a relief. No, she was a pleasure.

The production of This Brooding Sky had been such a success that Margaret's dream of a lesbian theater company was becoming a reality. She laid out plans for a professional company that would be called HAG Theater. Margaret said although a hag is usually thought of as an ugly old woman, she was reclaiming the name and reclassifying a hag as a wise elder. People responded well to the name and to the productions.

Our first HAG production for a paying audience came in the winter of 1994. Hollandia '45 by Sarah Dreher was again produced at the Ujima Theater. We played to a full house of both straight and gay people every night.

Hollandia '45 is the story of Kit, a nurse in the army of the Pacific during World War II who now lives in her memories. Her niece wants her to sell her home and move back to the family. I played Kit at age 35 and 70, during both wartime and at home many years later. The scenes shift back and forth from the Pacific barracks to the porch of Kit's home during her aging years. The reviewer, Terry Dorn, said that I was a different kind of female main character: large, strong, purposeful. He compared me to Raymond Burr and Alec Guinness. (Because of the review, the next production of Dykes Do Drag featured as MC, me playing Perry Mason in a grey suit with my hair slicked back).

Our next production was Chamber Music by Arthur Kopit. It centers around a group of delusional "famous" women in an insane asylum, plotting to take over the institution. I found the plot somewhat confusing but in the end I earned a nomination for an Arty award given by Artvoice Magazine for my portrayal of Susan B. Anthony

In the third year of HAG, Margaret asked me to play in one of a set of four one act plays by Carolyn Gage. The one-woman play called "Cookin with Typhoid Mary" depicts the life of Mary Mallon, the Irish cook who infected many of the New York City aristocracy with Typhoid fever. This was a challenge since I had to play Mary with an Irish accent.

During much of the production I stood at a long sideboard cutting vegetables and talking about the terrible conditions on the ship from Ireland to America, Irish poverty, hatred of the English and Mary's continuous run from the law and the health department. I became so wrapped up in the character I popped pieces of potatoes and carrots into the audience while railing against the English legal system and the plight of the Irish during the potato famine. The audience was delighted and you could feel their emotions follow Mary's joy, anger and sadness.

Typhoid Mary received extremely positive reviews, as did the performances by

Margaret's daughter, Kate Elliot who performed a one-woman piece as Joan of Arc and Renee Robinson for her piece on Calamity Jane. My review, however, was given prime focus. It would be the best—and last—review of my acting career.

Buffalo News Review by Patricia Donovan, Dec. 7, 1995 (excerpt):

Madeline Davis, as Mary, narrates her tale from behind a chopping block where she hacks away at innocent vegetables with undisguised rage and glee, describing the horrors of an Atlantic passage in steerage in the arms of her dying, and then dead, mother…

…Davis, a marvelous singer and songwriter, is also quite a powerful actress and gives a gripping, intelligent and witty performance. She imbues Gage's very good writing with a passion and a power that breathes enormous and sympathetic life into what could easily be an unsympathetic character -- a big, blowsy, snarling Irish broad who also happens to be spreading the plague all over New York City. Davis frequently breaks into song, slamming her fury into the audience's face as she chops and howls the misery of a lifetime into the wind.

I was pleased at having performed well and thrilled with the review. The evening of the second performance, Margaret called the casts together backstage. She first gave a pep talk to those whose reviews were less than stellar; congratulated those who did well. Then she addressed my performance and review, raising her voice.

Margaret berated me and cautioned me not to pay attention to the raves, not to play to the audience; to keep my mind on the script and to not over act. She continued to disparage the good reviews until her daughter Kate spoke up and said, "Mother, I think that's enough."

It was enough for me too. I finished the run of the play but left the company. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to act with HAG. It was a unique troop. Margaret was a brilliant director. And the cast members were very talented. I love acting, and I loved being on stage in front of an audience; being a star in this small sky. But I was no longer willing to stay with the company. Perhaps it was Wendy's love and support that got me to see that I didn't have to stay at the price of my humiliation.

Wendy thought that Margaret was jealous of me and perhaps this is why she enticed Leslie. I don't think that was all of it. I think they were mutually attracted and neither had a sense of ethics that would allow them to wait until Leslie broke up with me and was free to pursue another relationship. Wendy also said that Margaret would flirt with her and that she was quite tickled by it. Sexual and romantic attention is always a charm but there was no interest beyond that.

Wendy loved me. She was supportive of everything I did. But it was always my singing that she loved. When I left Hag, Wendy continued to encourage my singing. She knew where my heart was and that acting was secondary and would quickly fade into the background.

When I think of 1993 and Liz, Margaret, and Leslie, maybe there is something to my looking for mother love in all the wrong places. With each—mentor, director and girlfriend—I'd start out thinking this will be a great project or a great love, but then the relationships would

replicate the worst aspects of my mother and me. I believe I had unrealistic expectations and when my assumptions proved incorrect, I was devastated. Yet unsinkable!

With Wendy Smiley I would find what I was looking for in the last place I thought to look.

28
Wendy

It only happens in the movies. I finally figured it out. Wendy and I are living in a movie. Except that we empty cat litter and overstock peanut butter and she's a meat eater and I could easily be a vegetarian but I live with a meat eater and it's too much trouble making so many meals. But, other than that, it's a movie. It's a love story. Two middle-aged women who fell in love because one sang and the other was a computer whiz. It is about two women who believe in the moral imperative of tikkun olam—repair of the world—and live their lives accordingly. It's the story of two Jewish ladies who came home. It's about familiarity and difference and comfort and security and laughter and cats and dogs and a garden and a spiritual connection and two good brains that think as differently as beings from different planets.

She loves Broadway. I hate it. But I can sing every show tune up to 1970. I love poetry. It leaves her dizzy. Thank God we share classical music. She can fix a computer glitch in minutes but she can't explain to me how she did it. I can write a song in less than an hour and she just shakes her head. We eat dinner at 7 p.m. and watch Bones reruns over and over. She watches Suze Orman. I watch Keith Olbermann. We both love Rachel Maddow. We never watch Fox News. We would eat worms first.

Being with her is so easy. She takes things in hand. She listens intently. She does not expect me to be "on". She gives helpful criticism and loads of compliments. She is loving and supportive and has no tolerance for drama, even mine. She has satisfied the one definitive demand I ever made: absolute adoration. From the perspective of 16 years together, she has completed my life.

Wendy and I are perfect.

We had our first date in the fall of 1974. We walked in Delaware Park near the Rose Garden and sat on a bench. She was short, black-haired and dark eyed, like a Hebrew doll. She was very smart and not at all shy. On that first date she asked me to marry her. She told me that I fit her criteria for a wife: Jewish, musical and smart. She said she knew from the first moment she heard me sing that this was going to be the right relationship for her. My concerns were different. I was 34 years old. She was 20. No matter what criteria she might have fulfilled, they couldn't surmount the age difference. She was charming, but she was a kid. I told her I was complimented but essentially she should find someone closer to her own age. In answer to her marriage proposal I said, "How sweet. Thank you," and sent her home. We parted friends.

Over the years we continued to see each other out in the community, in organizations, at political actions and dances. She was in college. I had a career. We had our problems in the 1970's with lesbian feminism and gay men, but we were part of a movement and making progress was important to both of us. She attended all of my concerts. Both of us had romantic relationships and affairs with other women. But I was not above flirting with Wendy even though

I continued to view her as a youngster.

Wendy went to work for Bell Atlantic, now Verizon, and was President of GLOBE, Gays and Lesbians of Bell Atlantic. She was instrumental in securing domestic partner benefits for LGBT workers. She also worked for transgender inclusion within the organization and later, throughout the company. Wendy was a union steward. She spoke at Pride. She was a quiet, strong, determined activist. And in 1994 she asked me for a second date, thanks to Shane, my old lover.

In March of 1994, Wendy was at Shane's house. Shane had heard I was newly single and said to Wendy, "You should call her. You have a 15 minute window of opportunity. When you tell her you do Reiki she'll fall at your feet." Shane knew very well that I don't fall at anyone's feet but Shane was clever and Wendy called.

On the first of April, we went to dinner at Orazio's, a fancy Italian-American restaurant in north Buffalo. We ate and laughed and were more comfortable with each other than I had anticipated. To my surprise, she had grown up. I was now 53 and she was 39. It seemed that the age difference had shrunk. When we left the restaurant she asked if we could go out to the parking lot and neck. My mouth dropped open and I was speechless for one of the few times in my life. Then I laughed. It was so high school. As was my response: I don't do that on the first date.

Wendy took me home to the house in Kenmore where I had moved almost four years before to take care of my mother. She walked me to the door. I told her I'd had a great time and I'd love to see her again. And she kissed me good night. I was surprised at how satisfying the kiss was.

Wendy was someone I truly had never imagined I'd be involved with. Besides thinking of her as too young, she was not my "type". I was attracted to mostly bad girls—Elizabeth being the exception. I was used to immediate pressures on a relationship, ex-girlfriends in the picture, friends who might disapprove, parents who either disliked the idea that their daughter was gay or who disliked me, and other assorted reasons that would create tension. I was so familiar with that kind of pressure that it had made previous relationships perversely exciting. There were obstacles to conquer. There were opinions to change. With Wendy, none of that existed. It was too easy.

After our first date she called me the next day and asked what would be the best way to win me over. I said flowers and candy would be a good start. I was kidding. Within the hour she was at my door with a dozen roses and a box of chocolates. Maybe this could be a nice thing. She invited me to her home for dinner. That evening she made asparagus omelets. They were delicious. It was then that I administered my "Rimsky-Korsakov Test". I asked her what Rimsky-Korsakov's first name was. She had no idea. Right answer. All she had to know was that it wasn't Rimsky. I had made that mistake at 17 and was so embarrassed. This riddle became a test I gave to a potential lover I thought I might be around for a while. Would it have meant the end if Wendy had answered it wrong? Probably not. But I was gratified that she had passed.

We subsequently necked on the couch and headed for the bedroom. Unexpectedly, in bed, I suffered a minor asthma attack from an allergy to the eggs. But I had my inhalator next to the bed—it is never far away since I developed asthma at 24—and used it while she was…busy. The asthmatic moment passed and all was well. That night was the beginning of many nights that led to a lifetime.

Wendy's birthday is May 12. That year she was turning 40 and hosted a huge party with all of her friends in attendance. Her parents and three sisters flew in from Long Island. We had been seeing each other for about six weeks and she presented me as "the girlfriend". Her parents were thrilled. I was Jewish. That's all they had to hear. The word kvell comes to mind (to be delighted). It made me nervous. I was much more used to families disliking their daughter's partners. Perhaps the girlfriend confirms their daughter's lesbianism and that makes them uncomfortable. But this family was so different. They embraced me immediately. Their nice Jewish daughter had found a nice Jewish girl.

Her family was intellectual and warm and charming. Elly, her mom, said to Jerry, her dad, "She looks like Cousin Dorothy," an indication to me that I was akin to family. I never experienced such acceptance even from my own family. They treated me like one of their own. Then when her father found out I had had a book favorably reviewed in the New York Times, he was convinced I was the one. During the weekend of the birthday party, Wendy told her parents that the house across the street from me in Kenmore was going up for sale. She already owned a cute little house in the city but she wanted to be closer to where I lived since we were seeing each other almost every day. The four of us went to the house and met with the owners. By the middle of August, Wendy moved in and became my across the street neighbor. Every morning, summer and winter, in a robe and slippers or a down jacket and boots I walked across the street to bring her coffee. Our relationship blossomed even though we spent most of our nights apart.

In the early spring of 1995, I suddenly noticed that Wendy, who had been asking me to marry her since 1974, had stopped asking. I was alarmed. Was the bloom leaving the rose? I attempted to re-open the discussion. I suggested it might be nice to have a summer handfasting ceremony in the woods with my Wiccan coven and a few other friends. Wendy said the kind of ceremony she wanted would be one in a temple under a chuppah like her parents and her sisters. It was an overwhelming concept for me. I had not been involved in synagogue since I was 12 when our Conservative rabbi told me I was too young to participate in a discussion about the existence of God. From then on I only went to my mom's Reform synagogue when she needed a ride to High Holidays or an occasional Shabbat evening service. It was very difficult to even think about our lesbian relationship being blessed by a real rabbi.

We made an appointment with Ronne Friedman, Temple Beth Zion's chief rabbi. We knew from a newspaper article that he had performed same sex Kiddushin, the blessing of a relationship, tantamount to marriage, when he was with Temple Israel in Boston. He asked if we were both Jewish. We said yes and he went on to ask about our lives together, why we wanted the ceremony, what it would mean to us to be blessed in Judaism. At the end of the conversation

he agreed to "marry" us. We had assumed that, because we were lesbians, he would hold the ceremony in his office or the meeting room. He said No, the sanctuary was the right place for our joining. We were thrilled. The planning began.

Our guest list grew to 265 people. Just about everyone responded positively. Sadly, my brother did not attend; He did not want to be in my mother's company. We hired the temple's caterer and picked out a menu of appetizers. Ed from next door was a wine distributor so we paid him to bring in cases of wine. Our friend Dodie Braun whose family owned a florist business supplied flowers and she and her brother made a wedding cake with real flowers coming out of the top like a glorious floral volcano. They even made a chocolate Groom's Cake with a pure chocolate bell and flowers on it.

About two weeks before the wedding Laurie Githens from the Buffalo News contacted us. She wanted to do an article on the wedding. For a full day we had a photographer follow us around while we went to stores to shop for wedding outfits. Laurie interviewed us for hours. The two-page spread with color photographs was fabulous. There we were, a pair of "old dykes", to be married in the largest synagogue in Buffalo. Most of the responses were truly gratifying; very few were critical of us.

We did not know until after the wedding that Rabbi Friedman had gone to the Temple Board of Directors and announced that he was performing the ceremony. He did not ask for their agreement; he presented it as a done deal. We also did not know that a few members were incensed and left the congregation. When Miles Fox, the Temple Director told us about the withdrawals he added, "We don't need people like that at our temple."

On our wedding day Wendy and I wore white cotton pants and shirts with purple satin vests and Kipas (small round caps) made by our friend Jim Strach. We looked very Jewish. While we were busy dressing and running around being crazy, an item appeared in our back yard. It was a lavender garden gazing ball on a pedestal. There was no card with it, no note, nothing. We all went out into the yard and stood staring at it. What was it? I jokingly said it might be a bomb. Knowing homophobes, nobody laughed. It took at least 10 minutes for Wendy to get brave enough to pick it up. It didn't go off and we all let out a relieved sigh. Later we found out it was a gift from our friends Debbie and Mary Lou who had dropped it off.

Before the ceremony we went to the rabbi's study with our witnesses, Kathy Hussey and Stephanie Owitz for Wendy, Annie Sterling for me and we all signed our Ketubah, the Jewish marriage contract, which we had rewritten so that the genders were correct and the vows appropriate. We have it framed in our living room along with 19th century printings of the first page of Genesis and the first page of the Book of Ruth.

The wedding was the most powerful ceremony I have ever witnessed or participated in. I cried from the moment we started down the aisle until we walked back up. Wendy's sisters, Gail, Amy and Tammy and my sister Sheila stood at the four corner poles of the chuppah which was a crocheted bedspread that Wendy's great grandparents had brought over from Russia. Wendy's mother and father and all three of her sisters had been married under that chuppah.

And now it was her turn. There is not a word for how important that was. The chuppah signifies the home that the couple will make together. And that is what we were doing.

Wendy's parents and my mother read poems and bible passages during the service. The assistant rabbi played the guitar. As a part of the ceremony, which took place on a Saturday evening, the two rabbis conducted a Havdala service which officially ended the Sabbath and then began the ceremony of Kiddushin. We circled each other in the Orthodox manner, binding each other together. We broke the glass (actually a fluorescent light bulb that breaks more easily than actual wine glasses!). We drank from Jerry's Kiddush cup that had belonged to his grandfather. We read our promises to each other. The rabbi blessed our union and we descended from the Bimah (altar) hand in hand to the applause of over 260 friends and family.

The party was a huge bash. The DJ played the first slow dance and after we danced with each other, her parents cut in and Wendy danced with her father and I danced with her mother. Then we switched. It was a lovely gesture. Black Triangle, the women's drum group to which I belonged, played Afro-Cuban music. Since we had hired a DJ with eclectic tastes, every type of music was played, waltzes, Irish jigs, line dances, and 50s rock and roll. People danced until midnight, drank champagne, ate little kosher hot dogs wrapped in pastry and chicken on a stick and had a wonderful time. By the end of the evening people left the temple in great spirits. We had help moving all of the gifts into our station wagon and we drove home.

Wendy and I climbed the stairs to my bedroom with a huge bag stuffed with envelopes. We started to get undressed and realized that amidst all the activity we hadn't eaten all night. I went down to the kitchen, made tuna fish sandwiches and brought them up to bed. We spent our first night as a married couple eating sandwiches and counting checks until we were too tired to see straight. We fell asleep in each other's arms.

We spent all of our nights together after the wedding, but since the third floor space which was going to be Wendy's bed-sitting room was not yet finished, we did not officially live in the same house. Within a month of the wedding, the white, open airy space was completed. Wendy rented out her house and moved into ours, augmenting and completing the family.

When they first met, my mother was gracious and warm towards Wendy. Unfortunately, mother's attitude slowly changed from bright and humorous to cranky, demanding and argumentative. Wendy had moved right into my private loony bin. But she was so resolute and loving. I don't know if I could have survived without her. She helped me take care of my mother. I went to her with problems. I cried on her shoulder. We shared responsibility for taking my mother to doctors, hooking her up to IVs and putting up with her deteriorating personality. Wendy was my wife and my salvation.

About six weeks after the Jewish wedding we did have a Wiccan handfasting with my coven in a circle in the woods. Almost two years later, we went to Vermont and had a Civil Union. In 2006 we traveled to Niagara Falls, Canada and were legally married in a non-denominational ceremony at the Two Hearts wedding chapel. We are now religiously, spiritually, civilly and legally married in our home state. I believe we may be the most married

lesbians in Western New York.

29
Animals

As a young girl I never really played with dolls. Nor do I recall wanting to grow up to be a mommy with my own children. But I did dream of having my own cat or dog.

I wanted a cat since I was seven and fell for a grey and white striped cat we named Tootles Bonshnook, a feral, pregnant cat my grandmother let give birth to a litter under the daybed at our summer cottage at Crystal Beach. We found homes for Tootles' kittens even though I wanted to keep them all. Tootles, always an outdoor cat, left after her litter was gone. I felt an emptiness I had never felt before. I believe all of my maternal instincts had been triggered by that cat.

I'm not sure why we didn't have pets. I think my mother might have thought they'd mess up the house. When I was about ten, I wanted a dog so much that my parents finally took me to the SPCA and I picked out a puppy. But they wouldn't allow it to sleep in the house so we had to make it a bed in the basement. The poor thing was young and lonely. I gave him a hot water bottle and a wind-up clock, but he howled and barked so much I spent three nights sleeping with him on the basement floor. That was the end of the puppy experience. We had to return him and there were no more animal experiments in the house. I knew I was too young to care for the puppy all alone and I was sad and angry with my parents who would have no part in helping me.

After the puppy we had no animals during my childhood. I vowed I would have animals when I grew up. Lots of animals. And I did.

Ever since I left home at 19, I've always had cats. I was with Carl when we had a grey, striped cat who would jump out of the window at night and the next morning would bring me gifts of mice and lay them on my pillow. When Carl and I broke up, I moved to a third floor apartment on West Utica where I baby sat for Arthur, a huge Siamese who would plant himself on the end of the ironing board and stare at me with his big blue crossed eyes. Arthur was cool. He took it for granted that I would accede to his every wish. He became my permanent cat and, although he did his other business in the litter box, he always sat on the edge of the toilet when he peed. I attributed this habit to Arthur living with a single girl who always used the bathroom with the door open.

Fido and Nesbitt came when I was with Allen. They were the kittens that traveled across the country with me, Allen, and his friend Flo, when we eloped to Reno. When Allen and I split up a year later and I left town, I gave the kittens to my friend Phyllis. She sent pictures regularly. Fido and Nesbitt lived to ripe old ages.

When I lived with Terry we adopted two long-haired, female cats. One was named Harriet, after my mother. The other was named Monster, after Terry's mother. Both turned out to be the most loving, talented kitties. During my relationship with Elizabeth, I still had Harriet and Monster but Elizabeth decided she wanted a pair of cats of her own. She chose a pair of

female Maine Coons, a very large, very sweet breed. She named them Flotsam and Jetsam. They were thrilled with Harriet and Monster and we had a family.

Although I still had Harriet and Monster, Barbara Jean came to live with me when Elizabeth and I had broken up and I moved to my friend Juanita's upstairs apartment. Barbara Jean was a trouble maker, always getting into things. She especially liked to slink like a tightrope walker around the old fashioned bathtub. One day my friend Nell was visiting when we heard heart-rending meows coming from the bathroom. We ran in and no cat was to be seen. We then heard the yowling coming from the laundry chute above the tub; I must have mistakenly left the door to the chute open.

I could barely get my head into the small opening so my very slim friend Nell leaned in with a flashlight and saw poor little Barbara Jean sitting in the chute, unable to either slide down or jump up. Unfortunately the chute was not a straight fall or she would have landed in the basement clothes basket. Instead, it zig zagged and the cat was stuck about five feet down.

Nell literally poured herself down the chute, arms outstretched with me holding on to her feet as she scooped up the frightened kitten and I pulled them both out of the opening. Barbara Jean scampered away and hid under the bed. Her savior Nell took a shower.

I decided that Barbara Jean was so traumatized by twenty minutes in the laundry chute and an hour under the bed that she could use a friend to ease her anxiety. I brought her a kitten. Barbara Jean and Amelia became great friends. They were inseparable and every night, they slept in each others arms. I had them both for almost 18 years.

After I moved home to take care of my mother, and before Wendy moved in with us, mother and I were living with five cats in the house, my three and her two. Mother finally decided cats were good companions and one after another she adopted calicoes, all of whom she called Sundae until an orange cat joined her family and was named Sherbet. I wonder if my mother watched me care for animals and realized that they could fill an emptiness she finally recognized.

One day Leslie, my ex, pulled into the driveway and extracted from her car a blue cat carrier. In it was a very young, striped grey, peach and white cat. She said she had all the cats she could care for and her neighbor, Mr. Licata, had been feeding this little stray. I couldn't say no. Louise Licata is now almost 18 years old. She has a cancerous tumor on her paw which we treated with chemotherapy and she is now a healthy, demanding, loud-mouth senior citizen.

I couldn't think of living without cats. The mythology is that all lesbians have cats, and Subarus. I did own a Subaru once. But I've always had at least two cats and at one point Wendy and I owned nine. So many of them are gone now. It's hard to lose these little – and some not so little – persons from your life. I remember and miss them all.

Wendy and I now live with five cats—and one dog.

My first live-in experience with a dog was when I was with Shane. She had Robbie, a black and tan Belgian Sheep Dog with long silky fur and soulful eyes. Sometimes he would sleep with me. He obeyed commands and was my protector. But he was her dog and when I left

Shane, I also had to leave Robbie. That was harder than leaving Shane. I cried a great deal, but I had left Shane for Terry and there was no going back. Over the years, as our relationships settled, Shane would leave Robbie with me for long periods. At one point he had knee surgery and Shane couldn't take care of him. I had him for two months. We were both very happy.

When I was with Bobbi Bailey she and I adopted a Samoyed puppy named Dassan who was really Bobbie's dog. He was about six months old when he came to us. He was beautiful and very sweet. I loved him so much and wrote a poem for him. Samoyeds are one of the few breeds that smile. I have a photo of me and Dassan in the grass behind the library. Both of us are smiling. When Bobbie and I broke up, she took Dassan. He began to chew the furniture. He should have stayed with me.

Elizabeth and I had no plans to own a dog. But one day we found Pransky, a brown and white Collie-Spaniel mix who was sleeping in the shrubs in our back yard. During a storm we coaxed him inside. He became truly my dog. Pransky followed me everywhere. We went to meetings together. He attended rehearsals of the City of Good Neighbors Chorale, Buffalo's gay chorus. We would walk the hiking paths at our cabin and he would lie in my lap as I floated on an inner tube at Blooming Hill Lake. He became my closest companion and when Elizabeth and I parted, he came with me. He was my buddy for many years.

I was living with Wendy when Pransky had to be put down. He was 17 years old and had terrible arthritis. I think Pransky was ready to go but was staying alive just for me. Wendy said it was unfair to keep him going when he was in such pain. It was so hard to be without him. He had been my best friend in a way that can never be expected from humans. He didn't judge or ignore or retaliate. He simply continued to love. I didn't think I could ever have a dog again. I was sure I could not stand the anguish of such loss.

Pranksy, like my cats Harriet and Monster, was one of the animals that had been so special to me and I felt so much that they were my familiars. A witch's familiar can be his or her closest companion, offering moral support, special knowledge, and/or physical healing. When they passed on I had bits of their ashes put into the handle of my athame – a ritual Wiccan knife- and along with ashes from our dog Pransky, they are with me always.

After Pransky passed it took over a year of healing before I went on the AKC website and took a test to ascertain what might be an appropriate dog for me. Number one was the Portuguese Water Spaniel, now known as the White House dog. However, I prefer long haired animals and so I decided on the number two choice, the Keeshond.

Keeshonden are originally a German breed but became associated with the Dutch. They were guard dogs on the barges that floated on the canals of Holland. They are a northern breed, double coated like a Samoyed and roughly that shape; grey, black and silver with a tail that loops over the back. A major characteristic is rings around their eyes that make them look like they are wearing glasses. They, also, are dogs that smile.

I was nervous about picking out a dog to own permanently, so I decided to join a rescue group and take a chance on rescuing a dog and placing it so I wouldn't have to make an

immediate commitment to ownership. I had been so used to the perfect Pransky, I couldn't imagine a dog that could meet his standard.

In the fall of 1996 I saw an ad in the paper for a five year old male Keeshond for $500. I knew the seller would never get that kind of money for a dog that old. I called and told her that I was from Western NY Keeshond Rescue and if she couldn't sell the dog I would be glad to take it and find it a good home. She said she thought she could sell it. I called the next week and then the next and finally she said, "Come and get him."

We drove out to Springville, a town due west of Buffalo and parked next to an old trailer on a side road. The woman came out and led us into a clearing. There was the most knotted and dirty dog I had ever seen. He was tied to a post and had two empty bowls by his side. No food; no water. He was so excited to see company he jumped around and woofed and wagged. It was a tragedy worth tears.

We brought him into the house and as the woman signed the papers turning him over to us she reached into a box and pulled out a doughnut and gave it to him. He ate it as if he had not eaten in days. We put on his leash and practically ran from the trailer and loaded him into the car. His name was Daemon. Both of us agreed it was way too macho a name for this sweet boy and he immediately became Dave. After a complete shaving and a bath at the groomers, we drove him home to Kenmore. This dog was so happy to be in a house where he received good food, daily walks and real attention that he turned into a most obedient and happy animal. Needless to say our plans to find him a new owner fell by the wayside. Dave was home.

Two years later I was reading the Keeshond email list and saw that two four month old female Keeshonds had been found wandering the streets of Columbus, Ohio. I asked my sister Sheila, who lived in Columbus, to go to the no-kill shelter and pick me out the quiet one. She drove the pup to a MacDonalds on the Ohio-Pennsylvania border where we picked her up. We brought her home and the sight of Dave made her jump with all four feet in the air. This wonderful puppy named Rose joined our family. My groomer was so taken with Rose that she adopted her sister, going through the same process; meeting my sister at the state border. She named her puppy Madeline.

Since that time we have rescued and found homes for over a dozen dogs. We have provided temporary homes for some and have kept two other males after we lost Dave. We have been part of rescue railroads for numerous Keeshonds over 16 years. It is a breed we have come to absolutely adore.

Rose is the only dog with us now. She is 13 years old and suffers from Cushings Disease and arthritis. She is at the center of our lives and we no longer go out of town together because we are committed to being with Rose until she leaves us. In her lifetime she has had three male companions. Buddy passed away last August. We will not bring another dog into our home until Rose is gone. She doesn't need the aggravation. She is the princess of the house and that is how it is.

But animals. Animals with fur. Animals with soulful eyes and independent spirits and

unconditional love. That's what I prefer to live with. That is what I cannot seem to live without. Perhaps Tootles, the feral cat at the cottage in Crystal Beach triggered the maternal protector in me. Perhaps that was why I was willing to sleep on a cold basement floor with a puppy. As a grown-up I also recognize the economy of animals. You don't have to pay college tuition, or buy them a car. On the other hand, we did just spend $4000 for chemotherapy for a "free" cat and $3000 on our rescue dog for Physical Therapy and Acupuncture. Our reward is their continued presence.

Wendy and I talk about downsizing our family as the animals pass on. We say, perhaps a few cats but not five. We say, no dogs for a while; then we can travel together. We say things. But if we read on the internet that someone is in need. If we get a phone call. If someone knocks at the door. We'll see.

30
Fat Sad Woman

I have not only been fat for most of my life; I've also been depressed. I'm certain that the fat as well as the depression is genetic. I had an overweight mother, a great grandmother who tipped the scale at 400 lbs while my maternal grandfather committed suicide and a paternal grandmother died in a state mental hospital after years of post-menopausal depression. Obesity and melancholia are all in the family.

I probably also suffer from mild OCD. I have a need to fill up space by collecting: musical instruments, fabric, china, books, personal papers. At least I put this personality trait to good use; it helps make me a good archivist. I am also a stockpiler. You can't have enough of…almost anything.

In the winter of 1980, I went to an indoor flea market and purchased a case of sardines. That's 24 cans. I like sardines. But not too often. I put them in the cupboard in the house I shared with Elizabeth. When we broke up I moved them to Ashland with Joanne. When we reunited, I moved them back to Elizabeth's. I moved them again to the apartment upstairs of Juanita and when I had to move to my mother's in Kenmore, I carried them to the basement storage room. Over time a few leaked and the cardboard box got greasy. But I just couldn't seem to part with them. When Wendy and I moved from Kenmore to Williamsville she said it was enough and dumped them. I had those sardines for 25 years and probably ate three cans. But it felt secure having them there. Just in case there's a great depression or a nuclear holocaust you can count on sardines.

I first entered therapy in my late 20's over situational concerns: issues with lovers, problems with family. However, I was not diagnosed with clinical depression until I was in my mid 50s. I think the doctors were awfully slow in diagnosing me. Perhaps it is difficult concluding that someone who does a million things and always shows them a happy face might be depressed. Considering how drugs have improved over time it's probably just as well. Wendy remembers when I began taking Prozac, so it had to be after 1994. Prozac didn't work. I tried one SSRI after another, all of which lasted about a year and then stopped working. I am now taking a drug that is prescribed for bi-polar depression and it is finally working. I recommend Lamotrigine. They are not paying me.

Describing my depression is depressing but I know and can trace my history: the times I didn't want to get out of bed, the times I thought about suicide but didn't have the energy, the gloom and doom. But I think of my grandmother Rose who taught me to be inventive and to be brave and not to dwell on troubles. She also taught me the Yiddish phrase, "Azoy z'kokhn ze lukshen," or, "That's how the noodles cook." It means "That's the way life is." That's how things are…so don't spend too much time or energy worrying about it. When Rose was really exasperated with someone going on about their troubles she would throw her hands in the air and

say, "Aw, give it a worm."

I still don't like dwelling on depression. I don't watch depressing movies or read depressing books. When I recognize feeling depressed, or, if Wendy says to me, "Have you cut back on your meds?" the urge is to ignore it or promise to do something and then ignore it. Sometimes I call my shrink, and ask for an appointment or a dose adjustment. Often it takes Wendy's prodding to get me there. It's hard to pull out and up enough to figure out what to do. I feel so stuck.

There have been times when a depressive episode has gotten the best of me and I deeply regret that it controlled my life. Such was the case with Judy.

When I was very young, my best friend, Judy, lived down the street. She was beautiful. I still look at pictures of her in her pink, frothy eighth grade Class Day dress and remember her with such pain in my heart. She was prettier than anybody I knew. She had the darkest hair that waved perfectly to her shoulders. She had huge, luminous dark amber eyes and painstakingly plucked thick eyebrows. She looked middle-eastern. The term sloe-eyed comes to mind. She had a perfectly symmetrical mouth and wore deep pinkish red Revlon lipstick. Her bedroom had white wallpaper with red tulips and green leaves on it. It was simple and feminine and when I stayed in the other twin bed for a sleep over it made me feel calm. It also made me feel honored to be allowed to spend time in her special pretty girl world.

My only doll looked like Judy. It came in a white box with a clear plastic window so you wouldn't have to leave the doll out on the shelf to get dusty. It was a Spanish dancer with a black-layered flounce skirt and satin top with red ribbons on her dress and in her hair. I loved that particular doll, to look at, not play with, and I loved Judy. We told each other secrets, mostly about boys. At twelve I told her I was in love with Gary. We both knew that Gary was in love with her. I don't know whether I really loved him. Maybe I only loved Gary because he loved Judy. Perhaps I was loving her through him.

As we grew older, I became the "big girl," a decided limitation in an adolescent social life. Judy and I grew apart. In the eighth grade she dated boys while I was elected Secretary of our eighth grade graduating class and became Salutatorian. That summer, Judy and her family moved out of the neighborhood to a small single house on Carmel Road in the increasingly Jewish Hertel section. My family remained in the old neighborhood. Judy joined a high school sorority that her smart, pretty sister belonged to. I joined a sorority in which many of the girls were "different". Even though we drifted apart, I still thought she was always the most beautiful girl. And I always loved her.

In the years that followed we would write each other occasional letters. She married a non-Jewish soldier she met when she was a volunteer hostess at a USO center in California. She had three girls to whom she gave Hebrew names. She got divorced and I don't believe ever married again although she did tell me about unsuccessful relationships with men. I told her about my marriage, my divorce, and my coming out. She was fine with it. She had become a liberal California girl. Then she developed breast cancer and had a mastectomy and radiation.

Her hair fell out and grew back. Then she got it again and had another mastectomy and chemo. Her hair fell out and grew back again.

Judy said she'd like to go to Paris and would I like to go with her. I gave her some vague answer. I couldn't go. I didn't speak French, and anyway, I was too fat. That was the real reason. In 1998 she called to tell me she would be in town for our fortieth high school reunion. I was to stay in contact with her and we would go to events together. I was in a terrible state of depression and didn't return her phone calls or letters.

Although I continued to sing and do some political work, I was unable to engage in many social relationships outside of my marriage to Wendy. Where I did find some relief was in synagogue and Jewish activities. I had been retired from the public library for three years when, in 1998, I was hired to serve as part-time librarian for Temple Beth Zion.

Because Wendy and I had become very fond of Rabbi Ronne Friedman who married us, and, because I was spending more time at temple, I took an interest in furthering my Jewish education. I studied Hebrew, learned to read Torah, went to Torah study classes and in the spring of 1999 made Bat Mitzvah. I was 59 years old. When I was 13, the usual age for someone to be officially accepted into Judaism as an adult, the Conservative movement did not allow girls to become Bat Mitzvah. It took a Reform temple and many years passing for me to be able to take my rightful place in my religion. And, although I was depressed much of the time, working and studying at temple was enough of a diversion so that the days were more pleasant.

Then after my Bat Mitzvah, in the spring of 2000, I was at the height—or depth—of depression. I had quit doing most things social and only engaged in spontaneous conversation with Wendy and with Elizabeth when she pushed me. My weight had ballooned to 310 lbs. and I was feeling ugly, ungainly and worthless. I begged my Internist, Dr. Snow, to refer me to a doctor for gastric bypass surgery. While being evaluated for surgery I contracted pneumonia. That, plus the fact that the surgeon, Dr. Caruana, discovered at least ten tiny stomach ulcers, I had to wait through much of the summer to schedule the operation. I knew the ulcers were a direct result of having to deal with my mother's deteriorating condition.

In July we hosted the annual birthday/anniversary party we have held for years. There is a photo of me in a black and blue caftan holding a bottle of salad dressing and grinning into the camera. I was huge. Until I saw the picture I had no idea how big I had gotten. It certainly added to my distress. But, occasions like the party were happy events; times when friends would gather and would reinforce their feelings of love for me. They were wonderful. I was a mess.

I underwent bypass surgery on August 28, 2000. I began to lose weight rapidly. By December I had lost about four sizes and Wendy and I went on a Caribbean cruise with her parents. It was a lovely experience. I recall walking through the ship's hallways; waiting for elevators in mirrored reception areas and looking at myself. I couldn't believe I was shrinking. It was practically an out of body experience.

My temple library job ended that fall and I began working for the surgeon who performed my bypass. Before my surgery I had asked Dr. Caruana to suggest a support group for Gastric

Bypass patients. He said he was going to start one. I asked again after the surgery and he said, "I'm waiting for you to start one." And so I did. I met with patients who were both pre and post-op, passed out recipes, wrote a newsletter, led discussions and acted as a liaison to the Dr.'s office. People were very receptive. We held the meetings at Sisters Hospital and sometimes had groups as large as 60. I really felt like I was doing something important for other fat people. We knew each others' pain and were able to commiserate and support each other. I also did individual peer counseling and led the monthly support groups for about six years.

It took about 18 months for the weight to come off and although my spirits lifted more often than when I was heavier, I was still subject to the weight of grey fogs for ostensibly no reason. I finally found a good psychiatrist who prescribed an anti-depression medication that has been working for over two years. Life has become lighter again.

In September of 2004, after my gastric bypass, weight loss and at least semi successful meds, my bout with depression had eased and I was feeling able to reach out. I decided to contact my friend Judy. I had lost her number and called her nephew. I told him my name and asked if he had Judy's phone number. He asked, "You mean Aunt Judy?" I said yes. He said, "Oh, I guess you didn't know. She died three years ago." My throat constricted. I asked if it was cancer. He said yes. I thanked him, hung up and stared out the window. I don't know how many hours went by before I wrote this letter.

Dear Judy,

I want you to know that I loved you. Sometimes I wanted to be you—you were so beautiful and charming. I also envied your popularity with boys. But I'm not sure I would have given up my brains for any of that. I guess I wanted both. Your sister Marcia was smart and pretty, and popular. Maybe I really wanted to be her. You listened to me wax poetic about Lenny so often, knowing that I had no chance and that he was in love with Mary, the paper girl. I was silly. I was 12. I agonized through my adolescence and you were there to give me encouragement. You painted my fingernails for the first time. You used "Cherries in the Snow". I remember your Class Day dress at school 74. It was pink and had eyelets at the neckline. You had huge dark eyes and black hair and a great smile and laugh. Years ago, when you came to visit from California, you worried about me because I had gotten so fat. Not long after that we made plans to go to the Bennett reunion together. I never went. I was ugly and hated myself and entered into a long period of depression. It was so awful and I couldn't talk to you about it. I couldn't talk to anyone. The last thing I remember about you was that you asked me to go to Paris with you. I said maybe Italy because I spoke Italian but not French. Then I disappeared. Were you angry? It would have been justified. By the time I had surgery, lost weight, emerged from my depression and was ready to resume our relationship, you were probably already dead. Your cousin Jay said it was three or four years ago. If you asked me today to go to Paris, I would go. I wouldn't let you die without me. I was too scared all these years to try to contact you. I thought I'd be too late and someone would tell me you had died. And that's exactly what happened. I'm so sorry for being too cowardly to call sooner. I was so

busy fighting my own demons. I couldn't get outside myself to call you. And now you're gone. Maybe I'll call Jerry Raven and meet him for coffee and we'll talk about you. He knew you. He loved you too – in a different way – but he did love you. I miss you. My childhood friends are gone. I'll never feel that connection again. I am very sad. Please know that I loved you more than I ever realized and that I shall miss you always.

Mad

For me, depression means a downward slide towards immobility. Nothing matters. I enter a thick cloud. There is dark at the end of the tunnel. I do daily tasks like an automaton. There is no activity except by rote, by habit, for necessity. My compulsion to accomplish takes over but there is no joy. It feels stupid, unproductive, uncreative. I have little energy. I think about being angry but I'm too tired for anger or any other emotion. Even breathing is a task. It's like lying around in tasteless pudding. It's heavy and hard to move, and it's harder to want to move. I dislike it intensely. Maybe that's the only bright spot during depression, being conscious of hating it. I am so fortunate that there have always been those around who have noticed that I'm in trouble. It's such an isolating feeling even when surrounded by friends. To be depressed when you're really alone must be terrible.

If there is advice I can give to anyone suffering from depression I'd say talk about it. Talk and talk and more talk. Holding it in made me very sick. Just say out loud to somebody, "I feel like shit." This is the first rung of the ladder out of the quicksand. Then, if necessary, find someone who will write you a prescription. I do believe in better living through chemistry.

31
We and Our History Find a Home

After years of political work, composing and performance, teaching classes, interviewing, researching and writing, I had accumulated considerable paperwork, and being a collector and stockpiler, had kept it all. Four, four-drawer metal file cabinets as well as cardboard cartons were taking up the attic and basement, waiting for me to do something besides pretend I would "get to them some day."

In the fall of 2000 I received a call from Jim and Don, old friends from my years in the movement. Jim Haynes, a professor of biology at Buffalo State College, was the "Jim" of the "Madeline and Jim Show." His partner Don Licht was an anthropologist, artist and gay activist. They said they were selling their house and had 32 plastic trash bags containing the records of the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier. They requested advice on their disposal.

I thought of Cornell, New York, Syracuse, Chicago, Los Angeles, all locations of active LGBT Archives. But I could not truly imagine the materials leaving Buffalo. Jim and Don sold the house and moved the 32 bags to their new home. They called again. I finally said, "Guys, they can't leave Buffalo. We have to have our own gay archive. I'll come and get them."

At the time, I was working part-time as the librarian for Temple Beth Zion, and Ron, a library school student from U.B., was doing practica with me for his library degree. A requirement for one of his courses was to write a proposal that included a Mission Statement and Collection Policy for a small special library. I thought the timing serendipitous. Would Ron consider writing it for a gay archive? He received permission, and within a month, we had an outline and a plan for the construction of a GLBT archive.

My partner Wendy and some friends went to work on our dry basement with its newly installed sump pump and began a massive cleaning project. We discarded old furniture, washed, bleached and painted walls and floors, installed newly acquired file cabinets, book shelves, hanging racks, office furniture and a computer. We re-covered my father's old workbench to be used for document and book repair. Jim and Don's trash bags arrived. My own papers and collection of lesbian and gay books were brought in. We had created a fairly comprehensive start for the Buffalo GLBT Archives.

Our group of volunteers—some with elementary skills but all with optimism—turned out to be innovative and competent. Norma Jean, a librarian I had worked with for years came twice a week and put books and periodicals in order. Paul contributed his Pride Committee experience and mounted a fund drive. Dan, a former archivist with the New York State Archives in Albany, organized materials and taught us how archives were arranged and described. Helen, a retired psychologist who knew much of the history, worked on a local news clipping file. Andy, a beautician with a penchant for organization and an intimate knowledge of the community arranged and filed. Yvonne chose us as an experimental site, devised a powerful database management and cataloging program with her son and began to input data. We were later joined

by Norma and Marietta as some of our original volunteers dropped out.

I started soliciting materials from every individual and organization I could think of. Items poured in: T-shirts, books, minutes, financial records, Buffalo-published GLBT periodicals from the 1970s to the present, awards, photographs, paintings, personal journals, drag outfits, recordings, posters, play scripts and on and on.

Although we were interested in the records of local gay organizations, we believed the stories of individuals who participated in the daily life of this community were of utmost importance. During the second year I was introduced to Jack, an elderly gentleman who had worked in one of the local factories. He said he had kept personal journals since the 1960s and also had amassed a newspaper article collection from the same time period. He wanted to clean out his apartment and offered to donate his collection. I went to the apartment with a friend of his and looked through the boxes. It was exactly the kind of material that would make our collection a window into the lives of everyday gay people.

With gratitude we took away five cartons of papers, notebooks, magazines and news articles and began to process them. Six weeks later I received a telephone call from his friend who had helped me move the materials. Jack had passed away. I was terribly saddened but it was clearly a lesson. We could not waste time. We were fragile and ephemeral. The materials of our lives needed to be rescued before we and they succumbed to time.

In the fall of 2001, as Director of the Archives, I constituted a Board of Directors and we had the Archives incorporated and registered as a 501c3 (non-profit) corporation so we could purchase materials tax free and accept tax free donations. Over the next couple of years the Board grew to eight members who continue to deal with the ongoing complexities of managing an expanding institution.

For three years Wendy and I lived in our three-story house in Kenmore with the Archives in the basement. It was too much climbing for both of us and in November of 2004 we decided we needed a one floor plan home and began house hunting. We felt free to move because my mother no longer lived with us. In 2002, after a long stay in the hospital, she went into a nursing home because she was physically incapacitated and we could no longer care for her. Of course, she hated the facility, the nurses, the food, everything. We visited her two or three times a week; she became more and more dissatisfied and nasty. Some of it was probably loneliness. Most of it was the result of dementia. My mother passed away in April of 2003.

Wendy and I looked for houses in the Kenmore area but all of them were too small. We then contacted my cousin Annette (the daughter of Rose, the aunt who accompanied my parents on their elopement) who was a realtor and she began showing me houses. The first house was wonderful. It needed work and much cleaning, but it was just the right size for two people who needed a lot of room. Annette insisted that we just couldn't buy the first house we saw so she showed me three more. I told her to stop showing. I wanted the first one. Wendy came to look at the house and together we decided it was the one for us.

Unfortunately, our house search was interrupted by my emergency hospitalization. Just

before we were to sign a bid, I spent a terrible evening with abdominal cramps that finally led me to the Buffalo General Hospital Emergency Room. Now this is not for the faint of heart: A colorectal specialist finally discovered that I had a hematoma that resulted from a burst blood vessel and I was seeping blood both internally and externally. With a combination of medication and radiology they were able to stem the blood flow but not before my body from waist to knees had turned deep purple. My tissues were saturated with blood. They had to replace ten pints of whole blood and ten pints of platelets. Needless to say there was no bid signing that week. The doctors were so impressed with my very rare condition that they wrote and published a medical article about hematomas due to blood thinners. Although my name is not on the article, there is an unmistakable description and a lovely photo of my derriere, displayed on the Internet.

I was only out of surgery for two days and still in the ICU when I told Wendy we had to put our bid in on the house. She told me it was ridiculous to do this before I was out of the hospital but I knew I was ready to act. Within two weeks I was home. We called Annette and put in the offer. After the usual bargaining we bought the house and began work. In April we moved into our new home in the village of Williamsville in the town of Amherst, an eastern suburb of Buffalo. Five bedrooms, a family room, a sitting room, an office, three full baths and a built in swimming pool—perfect for two people, two dogs, six cats and the Archives.

When we told people about the pool they said we'd hate it. It was too labor intensive. We'd never use it. You have to clean it all the time and test the water and balance the chemicals. Instead, we installed a heater and early May until the end of September finds both of us in the pool, doing laps, exercising, and just floating around on loungers enjoying the garden and our lovely water feature. Wendy and I both love swimming. The pool is also one of the places where we can be together and ignore the rest of the world for a time. It has become one of the best things about our new home. Even cleaning it is a Zen experience. I'm pleased to say that with the new house also came a period of relatively good health.

The Archives had also done well in its new home. In 2007 the Board voted to change the name of the Archives to the Madeline Davis GLBT Archives of Western New York. I was honored by their recognition of my service and I continue to work at making this institution as comprehensive and relevant as possible. We have now been working on the Archive for ten years. Wendy is President of the Board of Directors and she is also the technical guru.

Even though, at times, the work seems overwhelming, it is worth the effort. The Archives place this gay community in Buffalo, New York in the company of all those gay communities that have lived bravely and fought for a better world for our people. Its history joins the histories of those for whom the past is a treasure.

The MDGLBTA now consists of over 60 collections ranging in size from one file folder to nine boxes. We have a library of over 1000 books, a collection of music tapes and CDs, a video collection, a memorabilia collection that includes awards, costumes, drag outfits, crowns, statuettes and more. Besides photographs that are part of individuals' collections we have art photos, paintings, posters, six large boxes of t-shirts designed for gay and lesbian bars, sports

teams, contests, years of Pride festivals and events. We have many decades of GLBT periodicals and journals, tapes and transcripts of interviews and a large button and pin collection. We also have local newspaper and magazine articles on gay issues that date from 1929. Altogether this aggregation truly reflects the social, organizational, religious and legal history of the GLBT community in Buffalo and surrounding areas.

I have called the establishment of this Archive the last political project of my life. I am also pleased that it will remain an active archive far beyond my lifetime. We have recently signed a contract with Buffalo State College for the Archives to have a permanent home in Butler Library. Buffalo State houses the Monroe Fordham Regional History Center whose mission is to collect Buffalo's historical heritage. We have been assured that our Archive will occupy a unique space in the College's Special Collections and Archives and that it will be safe, administered competently, and accessible to students, researchers and especially to members of our community who simply wish to walk through our history and be proud.

We are currently moving carloads of ten to fifteen boxes to the campus. I shall continue to be Director of the Archives for purposes of accepting collections. My former volunteer, Dan DiLandro, is now Buffalo State's College Archivist. He knows our collection well and loves it as much as I do. It gratifies me to know that when I am gone, it will be with those who truly care.

32
My voice: pleasure and loss

Both of my parents and my grandmother Rose had lovely voices and our house was always filled with music. Grandma sang Yiddish folk songs and played mandolin in a trio that included two of her brothers. They performed on the radio from 1915 through the early 1920s.

I have been a singer all my life. For over 50 years I sang professionally and at times earned some of my living on stage. My career began at eight when I was a soloist for the elementary school glee club under Mrs. Burt who thought I might have a future as a singer. It was also thanks to Mrs. Burt that I became the only Jewish woman who knew the words in English, Latin and German for every Christmas Carol sung by any of the adult choirs to which I would one day belong.

At nine my girlfriends Jackie, Judy and I sang on a radio talent show, performing "Tulips and Heather". In my teen-age years I was too shy and self conscious over my weight to sing on stage but when I entered college I gathered courage and began to sing again.

At 17, the coffee house scene provided a home for my voice. My first time on stage was at a small, downstairs, refurbished basement, the Lower Level on Potomac Avenue. During his set, folk-singer Gene Michaels would call me to the stage and sit me on a stool. He played his guitar while I sang "The Ballad of the Four Marys" a plaintive English ballad from the Francis James Child collection of old English and Scottish songs. There were no female folk singers in Buffalo at the time; audiences were delighted and welcoming. People said, "You sound just like Joan Baez." I sounded nothing like her. They simply had never heard another girl folk singer.

In the summer of 1960, between my sophomore and junior years of college, my girlfriend Margie and I worked as waitresses on Wellesley Island in the Thousand Islands. My mother sent my uncle's old Mexican guitar and, with a Theodore Bikel songbook with chords on the back pages, we learned enough to play many of the most popular folk songs. After our waitressing jobs were over, we hitchhiked to Manhattan hoping to sing in the Greenwich Village coffee houses. At this time hitchhiking was pretty safe, even for women. But I must say the whole thing made me nervous. Margie was much braver than I.

We rented rooms at the Greenwich Hotel, a seedy establishment in the heart of the Village. Margie immediately fell in "crush" with a terribly handsome singer/guitar player named Dino Valenti. I was impressed that in his hotel room were little indentations in the armoire and plywood walls from his flipping his metal fingerpicks at them. We met the Bohemians, the Beatnicks, artists with paint on their bib overalls. Young men and women practically welded to their guitar cases. We even had a couple of beers with a fellow named Bobby Zimmerman who became one of America's best and most influential poets.

Margie and I got a few jobs in the Village. We played the Gate Of Horn, the Café Rafio, the Bleeker St. Café and a few other Beatnick hangouts. It was fun but I had no plans to make

folk singing my life. After a few weeks we both decided to hitchhike home; me to go back to school and Margie to travel west and become a San Francisco blues singer. A friend drove us across the Hudson and from there we stood by the side of the road, heading north. It began to rain. A car pulled over. The driver, an insurance salesman in his 50s picked us up and lectured us on the dangers of hitching. We thought it a ploy to get us into a motel. Instead, he drove us to a bus station near Newburgh and purchased two tickets to Buffalo. He left still warning us to be careful. We contemplated turning in the tickets for money but we were too wet and tired. We took the bus home.

After returning to college that fall, I began singing in local coffee houses, the Lower Level, La Critique, Raven & Hackett's Limelight Gallery, Rue Franklin West. I worked my way through college singing every weekend as well as working at the university library. By the later 1960s I also became a paid church soloist. Nobody asked if I was Jewish. And singing Christian music never fazed me. I performed with the University Chorale, sang solos and joined the chorus on such pieces as the Bach Magnificat. The choir director, Robert Beckwith worked with me outside of rehearsals. He said I had potential. I was becoming a real singer, whatever that meant.

Writing music began in the late 1960s when I became lead singer with a jazz-rock band, The New Chicago Lunche. I enjoyed writing solos and hearing the great arrangements the seven band members came up with. A favorite part of working with the band was my getting to wear glitzy gowns and outrageous hairdos. Bright and glittery attracted attention.

The New Chicago Lunche performed mostly at University venues: shows in the student union and in bars just off campus. We also appeared at loud, disrespectful drunk fraternity parties which we tried to avoid as much as possible. None of the guys ever seemed concerned that I was a lesbian and my high energy relationship with Steve Halpern added fun, spice and great duets to our performances. Our group folded in late 1969.

With the advent of gay liberation in Buffalo I wrote prolifically on gay themes and love songs for women and sang concert after concert to raise money for gay causes. I was on stage in one form or another at least once a month; usually more often. For a time I was Buffalo's only out lesbian singer.

Singing was not only an avocation; for a while it was the center of my life. I told people that as an asthmatic, singing kept me breathing so I had to do it often. I even had a guitar stashed in the trunk of my car so that I could sing on request. If a party started quieting down, people would ask me to sing and I would run out to the car for my guitar, warm it and tune it up and play for group singing. I was grateful that I had a talent around which our community could gather and have their spirits lifted.

I tried my hand at putting together a couple of lesbian singing groups in the early 1980s. I did duets with a few women and by 1983 I formed Madeline Davis and Friends. We held a fund-raising concert to help pay for a recording of my original music. It was enough of a financial success that I was able to make a recording at my brother's studio in San Francisco. He played

back-up guitar, bass and hammer dulcimer on some of the cuts. Daughter of All Women was quite a lovely album and I returned with it to Buffalo and had 500 copies made. They sold very well in our home community and to friends in other cities. I still own just a couple of copies of the cassette and we have transferred it to CD so that we can run off copies for friends that still ask.

In 1998, three years after Wendy's and my wedding at Temple Beth Zion, I also joined the temple choir. Working as a part-time librarian for the temple I had listened in on choir rehearsals. Cantor David Goldstein's amazing voice, his kindness and the choir's repertoire were irresistible. Learning to sing Jewish music imparted an unexpected appreciation for my culture. It was different from working paying church jobs where the lyrics didn't matter to me, only the quality of our little choir. This time I was singing the songs of my people; it became a spiritual experience I had never had before.

Sadly, by 2000 when I entered into my terrible period of depression I was hardly ever performing alone on stage. I only felt comfortable hiding in a group. After my gastric bypass and weight loss my mood improved somewhat and I was able to return to the stage as a soloist. Unfortunately it was not to last.

In January of 2003 I awoke one night with terrible stomach pains. Wendy drove me to Sisters of Mercy Hospital and they discovered an intestinal blockage. The next day they operated. The surgeon said the procedure was a success but within a couple of hours my vitals went down to dangerous levels. I stopped breathing. They rushed me to Intensive Care where I was put on a respirator. Because I fought the respirator they induced a coma and I remained unaware of my surroundings for two weeks. The community rallied. People came to the waiting room and chanted and prayed for my life. Wendy stayed in the ICU talking me through breath after breath. The hospital told her not to leave. The situation was precarious. My sister came from Columbus. Wendy's sisters flew in from New York.

After two weeks they removed the respirator, hoping I would breathe on my own but aware that they might have to reinsert the tube. Fortunately, I continued to breathe and was transferred to a medical room for another week. Every day I spent time learning how to navigate with a walker, and little by little to eat soft food. Cantor Goldstein came to my hospital room to sing the Mi Shebeirach, the prayer for healing.

From Sisters I was transferred to Kenmore Mercy Hospital for Rehabilitation. I had no muscle tone. The pillow was too heavy. I couldn't speak above a whisper. I had physical therapy every day for two weeks. They taught me how to strengthen my legs, to rise from a sitting position, to get up off the floor, to climb a staircase. A voice therapist gave me exercises that would help me talk again.

My voice sounded strange. One vocal chord was paralyzed from the intubation and after a short while both were vibrating without coordination so it sounded like I had two voices at different pitches. It was a weird, gravelly sound. And it was so weak I couldn't be heard in the next room. But, once I could walk efficiently with the walker, the hospital released me. For

months I worked hard to speak and be heard. My singing voice was a memory.

It is seven years later. I speak quite well now. There is nuance and pleasant tone. I have a melodious laugh. But I still have little power to carry beyond 30 feet. I cannot be heard across a roomful of people. In public, I use a microphone. Sometimes I play the guitar in secret, with the door closed, singing in a low tenor or high baritone. It's a nice but narrow voice.

A few years ago I did sing at a recommitment ceremony for my friend Danny and his wife, and not long after, for his wife's funeral. Other than that I have not sung in public. I tell people I don't sing any longer. It's been seven years so nobody asks any more. A few years ago I took voice lessons for six months, but the well meaning teacher did not know what to do with a damaged voice. I went to an Ear Nose and Throat specialist. He looked at my throat and said I was just fine. But I couldn't sing and singing was not his area of expertise.

Some nights I would dream about singing in my old voice. Those dreams are so full of joy. I awake silent. I cry. There is a piece of me missing.

For years Wendy has asked me to find a therapeutic voice teacher. She has been sure that somehow I could get my voice back. I found names and obtained referrals but did not call, afraid they would say it is impossible and my voice is gone. I didn't want to know.

Wendy says she just wants to hear me sing in whatever voice I still have. I told her I couldn't. I don't have the voice I have had all my life, the voice of spirit and quality. I have a pleasant voice in a limited low range, but it's not my old voice. It's not the voice that made people stand at the end of a concert and applaud and want more. I want my old voice back and I am scared I will be told it will be forever locked in my head, so I don't make appointments.

As I write this piece of my memoir, there is pain. It has been hard to think about my singing. Perhaps it is even harder to let my singing die this way. In the end, I cannot.

A month ago I called the Community Music School and explained my situation. They gave me an appointment with a teacher who has worked with damaged voices. On Wednesday evening, Oct. 6, 2010, at 6:30 I sang for her. She listened to a CD of my earlier singing. She is confident my voice can be improved. I am practicing three to four times a day for 10-15 minutes at a time because my voice tires easily. I have already added a few notes. They are not lovely. They are not strong. But I improve every day. Maybe if I work hard…

33
Swimming with Lesbians

July 26, 2009. It's opening night for the film documentary, Swimming with Lesbians, and I feel like a real movie star. In just a few moments I am coming to the big screen. 120 people sit in the audience at the Buffalo United Artists Theater on Chippewa Street. Wendy, the director Dave Marshall and I wait for the theater to darken and the talking to subside.

It was three years before that I received two emails and a phone call saying Dave Marshall was looking for me. I didn't know him or what he wanted; finally we connected by email and he explained. He was an editor/producer with a company called Post Central and was looking for help starting his next project. As a gay man he chose issues that affect the LGBT community and had just completed Autumn's Harvest, a documentary about the impact of AIDS on migrant workers in the United States.

Now Dave wanted to chronicle the gains made in the LGBT community over the last 40-50 years "through the eyes of an elderly lesbian couple". He was particularly interested in a lesbian couple so he could examine both women's rights and gay rights. My name had come up as co-author of Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold. Dave thought I might know a lesbian couple that would be interested.

I wrote him that although Liz Kennedy and I published Boots in 1993, it was a work that began in 1979. Many, if not most, of the women interviewed had passed on. Also, most of these women were not in couples and did not become part of a couple even in later years. The few still with us had friendship groups, most of the members being single as well.

And what did Dave mean by elderly? I was 66; Wendy was 52. Was that elderly enough? At the time Wendy and I had been together for 12 years. And we certainly had seen the changes as well as having been part of many of them.

I hoped I was offering Dave something he could use. I ended the email with, "Feel free to ask me more questions. I'm a librarian. I love questions."

Dave decided to take me up on my offer—and to use both Wendy and me.

Swimming with Lesbians was filmed from the fall of 2006 until the spring of 2009. It was a huge project and took up lots of time and energy. I wrote biographical material. I suggested possible footage and where to find it. I suggested others to be in the film. I digitized photographs to be used for stills. It took many months. But all the work was worth it. Swimming with Lesbians is a riveting documentary. Dave Marshall is a genius.

The night of the premiere in Buffalo was absolutely thrilling:

The lights dim and the audience quiets. The image on the screen is me in a red silk blouse and black pants. I am sitting on a chair in a long, white hall at the Market Arcade Gallery listening to Dave's questions about our first contact when he talked about the film he wanted to make.

The audience is silent and focused. This is my history; this is their history. Seventy minutes of reminiscences about their community: the bravery and pain of the life of my friend Vicky Vogue (Danny Winter) with scenes from his show, Vicky Vogue Vaudeville. The resilient and sad life of Peggy Ames, who, in the mid-1970s, made news as the first local transsexual woman to have sex reassignment surgery. Trans woman Camille Hopkins is her living representative in the film.

There is the extraordinary 94-year-old Tangara (John Minzer) who began a career as a female impersonator at age 15. He is interviewed about his amazing life on the stage from his nursing home bed.

And of course there is Wendy, speaking about Peggy's rejection by the lesbian community in the '70s, picking up materials donated by the drag organization the Imperial Court of Buffalo, and, with other members of the Board, discussing the Archives with representatives of Buffalo State College.

Between scenes, flashing on the screen, are photo after photo of the old days in Western New York's GLBT community—lesbian bars, meetings, picnics, gay bars, Pride marches, Dyke marches, and wonderful portraits of many lesbians, gay men and trans people who have passed on. Scott Perkins's beautiful music and Dave Marshall's and Thom Marini's marvelous photography move the film into places of exquisite intensity and emotional power. I could hear sniffles and sighs from different areas of the audience.

And, as promised in the title, I am in the swimming pool, talking about the Democratic Convention and the politics of the 1970s while the voices of Walter Cronkite, Daniel Schorr and my Convention speech play in the background.

Dave ends the film with a new version of Stonewall Nation playing while I walk through the Market Arcade Gallery looking at walls that might hold photos and art from our collection; musing about a place where the GLBT Archives might find a home.

Film over and the entire audience at the Buffalo United Artists is on its feet applauding and cheering. Our history on the screen. Our community and our accomplishments will live on. It is a joyous occasion.

In his Cinema Queer movie review, Michael D. Klemm would write that, "Local audiences will feel like they are at a family reunion, others may be amazed to learn that these things actually happened in Buffalo!"

One of my favorite quotes from Michael's review, "Folks, it didn't all happen in New York City and San Francisco." I also appreciated, "Swimming with Lesbians, while emphasizing Davis' archives, is a gallant effort to document the memories of Buffalo's gay elders before yet another generation passes on."

After the Buffalo premiere, Swimming with Lesbian would travel to film festivals around the country. Wendy and I went to the Austin International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival showing. It was such an important occasion that we decided to travel together and leave Rose in the care of our friend Kirt, one of Rose's favorite baby sitters. I subsequently traveled to Seattle

to see it and speak.

Swimming with Lesbians has also played in New York City, Indianapolis, The Rhode Island International Film Festival, the Mexico International Human Rights Film Festival, ImageOut in Rochester, NY, Swansea Bay Film Festival in England, and many others. It continues to make the rounds of festivals.

Dave has been fortunate to have the film picked up by Frameline, one of the largest distributors of GLBT films in the country and to have it shown at the Frameline Festival at the Castro Theater in San Francisco. It has given the Archives incredible publicity.

But regretfully, since the final filming, the wife of Danny Winter, the woman who lovingly supported her drag queen husband of 35 years, died in a nursing home. He was with her at the end. Don Licht and Jim Haynes, Board members who read excerpts from Peggy Ames letters and explained the history of gay liberation, married in Niagara Falls, Canada. 18 months later, Jim died of heart failure. Jim had been a close friend for 40 years. Even after we have seen the film 15 times, we are still pained looking at the screen images of Jim. Camille Hopkins left her home in Buffalo for Portland where she hopes to find less adverse conditions for trans people.

Tangara passed away within six months of his being interviewed. I was proud to deliver a eulogy. Here is a portion:

John Minzer/Tangara, Eulogy April 21, 2007

John was a magical person. He was a consummate artist who created beauty and elegance.

He started his career at 15 years old when he was hired by the Erie County Fair carny show to play Little Egypt. He went on to create the spectacular Tangara, who was known not only locally but on stages across the country. He even performed at Finnochio's in San Francisco which was the ultimate stage for female impersonators in this country.
John was also a warrior. At a time when impersonators were harassed by police, disparaged by the very people for whom they performed, and went unappreciated even by the majority of the gay community, John went out on stage and showed bravery few people would have dared to display. You rarely think of drag or female impersonation as political work, but this kind of courage, to open people's eyes to appreciate difference, is the very best in the effort to make the world a better place. He was at the cutting edge of creating a society that would become more open for all of us. And I think as he grew older, he knew it.

With the loss of both John and Tangara we experience a hole in our hearts and in the world. He was kind and generous; he was sweet and sophisticated; he was charming and funny; he was an extraordinary combination of innocent and wise. John was the brightest star and we shall miss him greatly.

And now Danny is here. As Vicky Vogue he has taken his place as Buffalo's senior drag queen. He wears the crown with elegance.

As Swimming with Lesbians makes its way from festival to festival, from private

showing to churches and colleges, we "actors" are left behind with our lives. It had been a unique experience to star in a movie. For three years, sometimes day after day and month after month, the camera focused on me. It recorded my stories, my worries, my jokes. With the gentle voice of the director, it loved me. It made me fascinating. And then, it was gone.

Our house is no longer filled with equipment and wires and lights. I no longer have to scan photos and send Dave tales of my history. After three years the whirlwind is over.

Since the film was made Wendy retired from her job with Verizon. She serves as President of the Archives Board, updates the website and keeps our computers working. Wendy is also involved in my writing and music and of course, her own ventures.

I am still a star but it is happening somewhere else, on movie screens in other cities. I feel a little lonely; a little empty. It was an intense, intimate relationship that ended because it was finished. Now the film has a life of its own. I am still busy in the Archives, assessing materials and packing boxes to move to the Archives' new home in Butler Library at Buffalo State College. I check the Post Office box for new donations.

Dave sends occasional emails telling me where Swimming is playing. But he has moved on to other projects. And so have I.

I am writing my memoir. There's always something.

34
Ending

As with most people who are aging, my long-term memories are the most vivid. I remember the red velvet snowsuit my grandmother made me when I was five. I recall the ice cream they gave me in the hospital after my tonsillectomy when I was eight. I remember the smell of auto grease, Old Spice and Pall Mall cigarettes—the smell of my father. These are memories that give me pleasure and make me smile.

I remember the whispered stories of my grandfather who was never around and nobody told me why. I remember the pressure of having to be the best, the smartest, the most creative because I couldn't be the prettiest. I remember wanting to take ballet. Memories I'd rather forget and can't.

I began writing this memoir one year ago. It has been difficult, humorous, painful, illuminating and constant. Writing has brought up the wonders and the sadness. It has been arduous, but it helped me put away pain and begin again. It has led to understanding what must be treasured.

This morning I walked the dog twice, did two loads of laundry, made curried cauliflower soup, watched MSNBC and tried to avoid thinking about the last chapter of this book.

I could not help but worry that I'd left out some important person or experience. Then, standing before the bathroom mirror, I saw what was missing. I am a tattooed woman and the pictures on my body say a great deal about me.

First, the story of the blue stars. In many lesbian communities around the country, gay women have been getting tiny blue stars tattooed on their wrists. The tattoo is usually on the wrist where a watch is worn and therefore the star can be hidden. The first blue stars were obtained one night when a group of fairly drunk dykes went to "Dirty Dick's" Tattoo Parlor on Chippewa St. Each had a tiny blue five-pointed star tattooed on the wrist where the watch would temporarily cover it. They knew it would identify them as lesbians but it was an act of resistance in an oppressive era. An in-your-face statement to the police, who recognized that the stars meant they were gay. One by one, a few lesbians, including myself and my friend Bobbi, followed suit in the mid-sixties. By the 1980s the fad had spread to lesbian communities around the U.S. This phenomenon is documented with photos, videos and interviews in the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, NY.

In 1980, my friend Lamar Van Dyke from Seattle was visiting her family in Buffalo. She had always drawn beautifully and now she was etching in permanent ink on flesh. Her work was inspirational and I was not about to be left out. I asked her for a small, discreet tattoo on my left breast, a phoenix rising out of flames, an image I had already embroidered on a velvet vest. I love the phoenix; it signifies resilience, never being kept down, being reborn out of destruction, everlasting.

When people see Lamar's work they ask, "Did it hurt?" They expect the casual stoic answer, "Not really that much." Truthfully, it hurt like hell. You have to really want it. Lamar worked away with outlines and colors and after almost an hour I had a glorious little tattoo that you could see only if I chose to expose it. I could be radical and safe at the same time. The formula didn't last.

Over the years I'd see Lamar at her shop in Seattle or when she visited Buffalo. She continued to tattoo me up my breast to the shoulder, around my body to the back of my right shoulder and on my thigh. My tattoos remain glorious, but they are no longer small.

I carry curves of peacock feathers indicating the element of air, which is not present in my astrological chart. Lamar has inked a spider web, representing Spiderwoman Coven, and a pair of tiny wolf faces representing the wild and a sense of community. She has tattooed my back with the face of a cat whose whiskers become feathers, representing my fascination with things that transmutate: butch women who look like men, drag queens, transsexuals. She has given me the mirror of Hathor, the ancient Egyptian goddess, sister of Ra, who personifies the principles of love, beauty, music, motherhood and joy. Hathor is also the patron of women.

I love Lamar and I love my tattoos. The images on my body represent what I am inside. They are there so I will never forget to be lighter, stronger, braver, flexible and a believer in magic. A photo of my tattooed chest and shoulders was used in 1995 as the poster for a popular tattoo show at Hallwalls, a local arts venue. And in 2009 another poster showing the tattoos was used by Planned Parenthood in a display called Empowered Bodies. It commemorated the 35th anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

We celebrated my 70th birthday this past July. Since Wendy and I had our synagogue wedding the day after my birthday we celebrated our 15th Jewish anniversary at the same party. Probably 60 people came. Danny (Vicky Vogue) and Ron. Danny is looking a bit fragile but still has amazing energy and a great sense of humor. He is lucky to have found Ron who cares so much for him.

Cousin Joyce came. She is just a year or so older than I and has remained beautiful all her life. She is an obsessive cat lover who takes feral cats to be spayed and neutered and builds them shelters. My friend Carol Speser does the same. She rescues strays in between ministering to the gay community as a chaplain and working for GLBT causes since the 80s.

My sister Sheila came from Los Angeles. I couldn't have a birthday without her. She is my best friend and a part of not only my personal history but my spirit.

Wendy's parents, Jerry and Elly arrived almost a week ahead. It's their favorite vacation. And they love the party. They are in their mid-80s and serve as an example of the most loving couple I know. Wendy's sister Gail and her husband Marc came. It was a pleasure having more family participate in the festivities.

A few of my exes were there with their current lovers or their best friends—sometimes the same thing. Olga and Linda have been together many years. Linda Dietrich and Kathy have been friends forever. Elizabeth and Carol were there. It is such a joy to have lovers who have

become family. My life feels more secure with them near.

A few people came with kids: Kathy, Wendy's best friend, with Neena and Naia; another Kathy with Bessie who was in my Sunday School library story-hour group. The kids, especially, love the pool.

Lawrence Brose and Vince Buscaglia came. Lawrence, a celebrated avant-garde filmmaker, is currently fighting a battle with the Federal Government over images they deem illegal. They target the arts because they are vulnerable. Lawrence will win but the process is excruciating.

My friend Annie Sterling came in her hippie dress and her long earrings. She still prefers that era to this one. I can't blame her. It was such fun.

And, of course, Lamar came. She flew in from Seattle and made two stunning cakes. For the anniversary, a tower of yellow cake with white butter cream frosting filled with strawberries. The birthday cake was in the shape of two books with my tattoo photograph on the chocolate icing book cover. Both cakes were photographed to death before the first cut.

Wendy and I have a comfortable life here in Williamsville, a village in the town of Amherst, this suburb of Buffalo. We are a couple of older ladies whom everyone knows are gay and it seems it doesn't matter. We walk our dogs—and clean up after them. We have our lawn mowed and our snow plowed. People admire our garden and I give cuttings and divisions to neighbors.

We have just been re-elected to the town Democratic Committee. Gay Rights is not a priority in our town but our presence makes a statement. People like us well enough. Then again, at a recent Democratic Committee meeting, while Bryan Ball, the President of Stonewall Democrats, gave a fine speech about solidarity with the party, two young committeemen sitting in front of me looked at each other and snickered.

Still, I am seeing more young same sex couples walk arm in arm down the streets of our gay Allentown and Elmwood Strip neighborhoods. I see bars not being raided and organizations no longer infiltrated by a government that used to fear our so called un-American activities. I see more and more candidates for political office espouse marriage equality even at the risk of their elections.

I was at a rally recently to protest the anti-gay pronouncements of the Republican gubernatorial candidate. It was well attended, particularly by straight allies. His remarks about us were shameful. He is indicative of the tasks ahead. We need more hands, more voices, more energy to combat the backlash growing along with our accomplishments. Younger people are working hard, and I am proud of them. We need more.

When I began this memoir, I thought a year might make a difference. I imagined things might improve a bit. We would have some small successes that would, in time, lead to an equal, loving world for us. The repeal of Don't Ask, Don't tell is a fine example. But bigots still beat us, gay children and young people are harassed in school and for some straight students, gay bashing is a sport. For many adults we are still an abomination.

This is the year we found out about the suicides. All over the country, young gay people, were killing themselves. Mostly they hanged themselves, but some took pills. One dove off a bridge. They couldn't stand being laughed at and beaten and pushed. They couldn't tolerate ministers, legislators, family members and people who were supposed to be their friends holding them up to devastating criticism; calling them unnatural and despicable. Telling them that not only do they never deserve to be married but they barely deserve to be alive. And so they decided to put an end to it. Some days it feels like we are doomed.

But, when I look back on this life, I know there is promise in the future. If you are young and gay and reading this memoir, whether you want it or not, your elder has some advice.

I want to tell you to watch your back. Don't remain alone. Find community. Know that it will get better. There are days when it will be fabulous and days when it will be just okay and days when you would like to kill somebody. But there will be hardly any days when you will feel like killing yourself. The anger will stop turning inward. And you will focus on doing something about it. Minimally, you can live a life of love, pleasure, and achievement. And you will be fulfilled. And THEY will not.

I have told friends that if I die tomorrow, I will have accomplished most of the tasks I have set out to do. But those tasks have increased and I get a little tired now and then. Wendy and I take an occasional vacation from the cause. I play the guitar; make a quilt, plant a garden. Quiet things. I am lucky. We have a warm home, beautiful animals that are terribly spoiled, cars that run and plenty to eat. I am also the most fortunate of women to be married to the love of my life.

Still there is much to do. So many times we have been on the verge of an achievement that could change the world. And we do achieve. But the world has not yet changed enough for us to live our lives in peace. And so we continue working hard with little time to rest.

When I see Lamar again I intend to have her continue applying ink. I remain a work in progress.

Addendum: Photographs, Poems and Song Lyrics

Madeline, 1941 Photo by Neisner's Studio

Neisner' was a very large 5 & 10 cent store on Main Street in Buffalo. It had a photo studio in the back beyond the snack bar. Most of the photos done there were of children or couples about to be married. Neisner's closed in 1978 as downtown Buffalo began to lose business to suburban malls.

This photo was printed in a collection called "Baby Dykes" ed. by Shelley Roberts

Grandma Rose and Madeline, 1943

I was three years old and the dress was red with white apples with green leaves. I always thought my grandmother was pretty and very, very old. She wore big clip on earrings. I have some in my drawer. This photo was taken in a park at Crystal Beach, Ontario.

Sheila and Madeline 1944
Photo by Neisner's Photo Studio
Sheila was my cute and bratty little sister. I tried to take care of her but she wouldn't be taken care of. She was independent even at 1 ½ years old.

Our Family 1951: Joe, Sheila, Harriet, Mark, Madeline
Mark was less than a year old. I was 12 and Sheila was 9. The couch was maroon and was stuffed with horsehair. My dress was navy blue with wishbone scatter pins near the neck.

Madeline on stage at the Richmond Off Broadway Theater
Rehearsing for "Let's Not and Say We Did" 1965
This photo is definitely representative of my penchant for drama.

Robbie and Shane
in the road near our house on Buffalo's west side, 1967.
Shane and I had been together for a little over a year. I may have been more in love with Robbie than with Shane. He was the best dog ever.

The New Chicago Lunche 1969
Joe Ford, Jim Matteson, Bruce Fisher, Steve Halpern, Virgil Day, Madeline Davis

This was a news photo advertising an upcoming concert at the University of Buffalo. John Weiss, the pianist was unable to attend the shoot.

First gay rights march on Capitol, Albany, NY 1971
Kate Millet at podium. Madeline first row with sign Buffalo Radicalesbians
This was the first time I ever spoke publicly on behalf of gay rights. I was surrounded by gays and lesbians from all over NY State

Playing guitar, 1971
Photo by Richard Roeller
This shot was to be used as a publicity photo. Richard was a photographer for the Buffalo News. He died of AIDS in the mid 1980s.

Madeline with Dassan, “First Dog”
in Cheektowaga Town Park, 1974

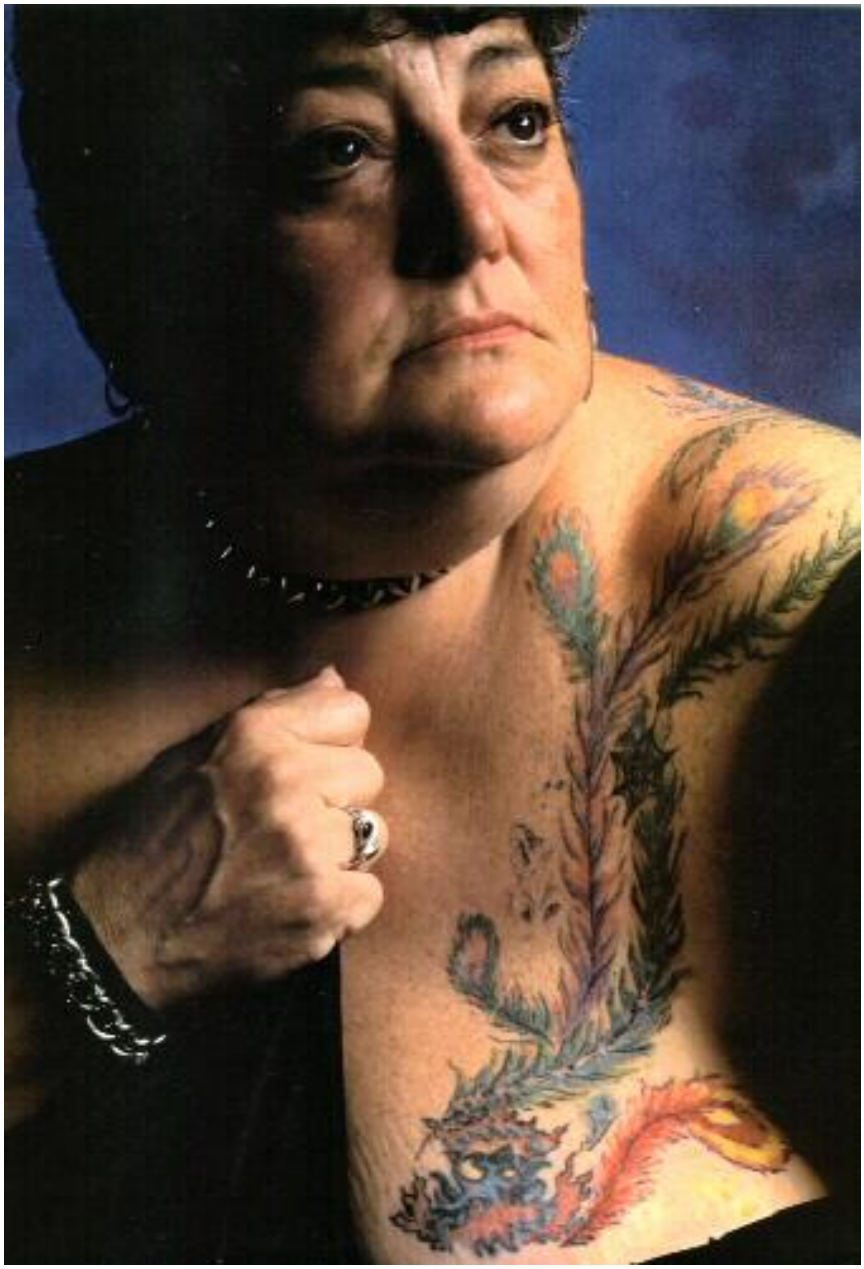
Dassan was a male Samoyed owned by my partner, Bobbie Bailey.

As most of the dogs in my life he became my friend. Bobbie took him when we parted.

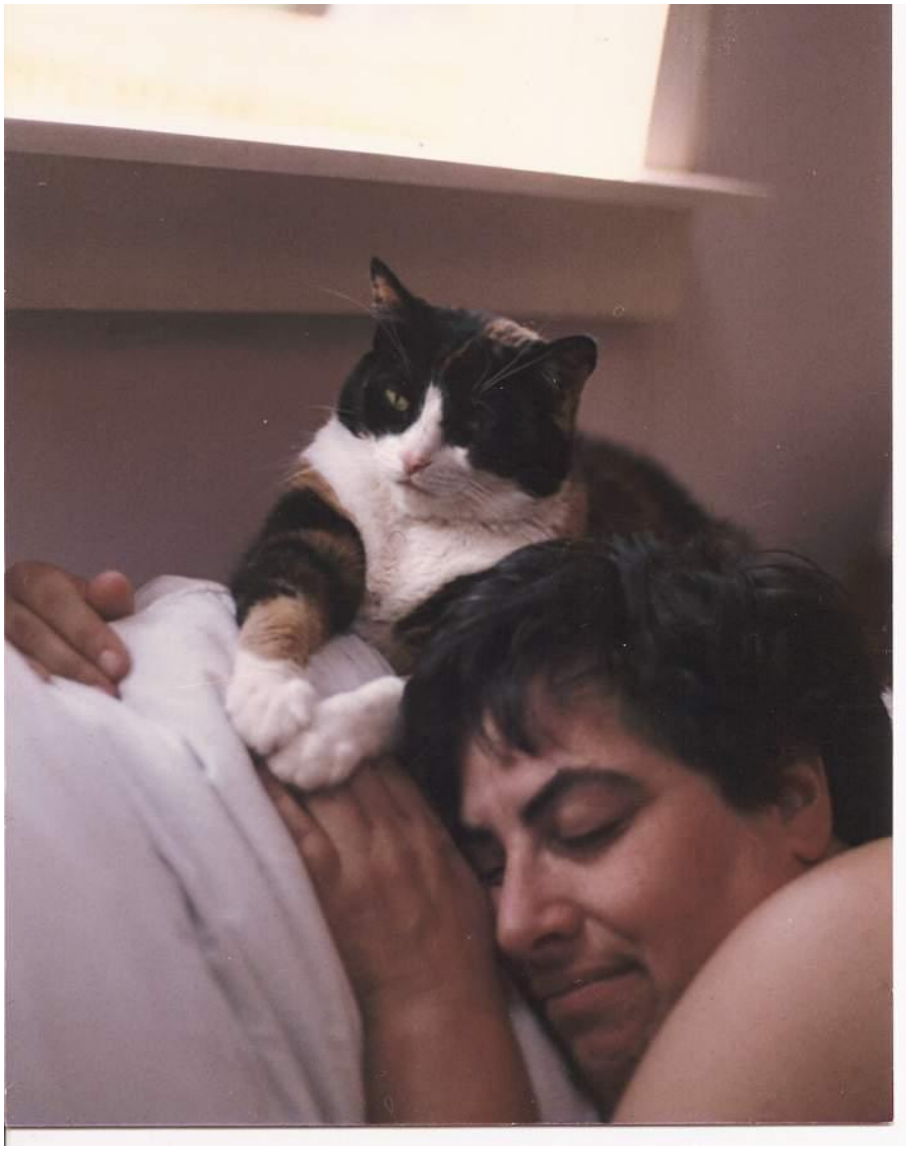
Elizabeth, home from Alaska, 1976

This is one of my favorite photos of Elizabeth. It was taken outside our cabin at Blooming Hill in Freedom, NY in late autumn. She was happy there.

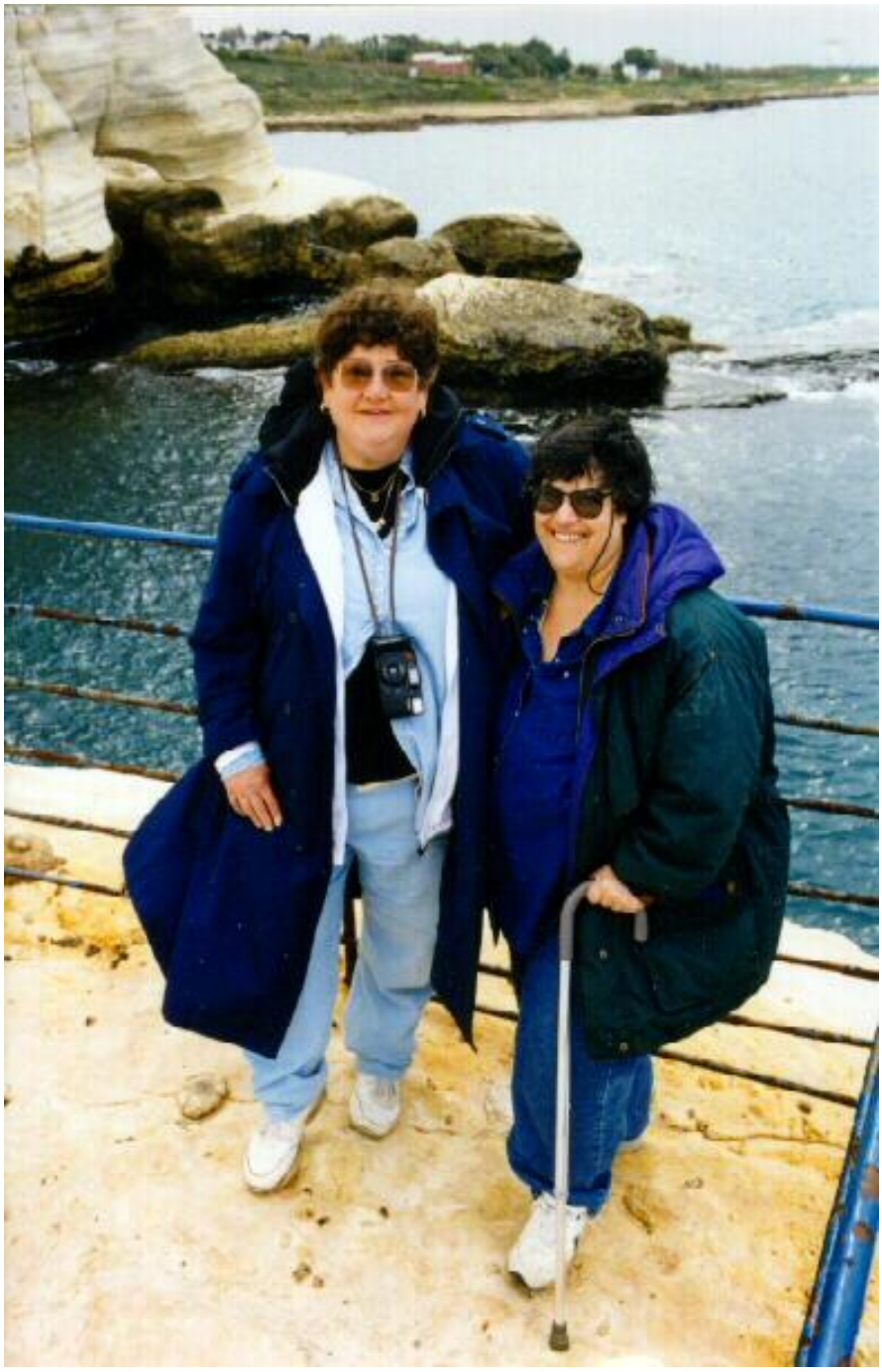
My brother, Mark Davis
between sets at The Cannery, Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco, 1989. Mark was a fine hammer dulcimer player and was also the booking agent for the cannery.



Madeline. Tattoo Poster. Photo by Pete Nasvytis.
Tattoo by Lamar Van Dyke
Hallwalls festival, Tattoo Me More 4. 1995
I was also MC and judge for this festival



Amelia and Wendy, 1996
Amelia often slept with Wendy and guarded her jealously from the other cats.



Madeline and Wendy
on the Israel-Lebanon border at the Mediterranean, 1998
This was our first and only trip to Israel. It put us in touch with our heritage and it was wonderful to share it.

60th Birthday
one month before gastric bypass, July, 2000
I weighed 310 lbs. that smile hides a woman in a lot of pain.

Wendy & Madeline at Passover dinner
At the North Buffalo Community Center, 2003
This was three years after the hospital and two months after being in the ICU after surgery.

Madeline with niece Jody in San Francisco 2004
Taken in Jody and Barb's back yard. She was finishing high school.

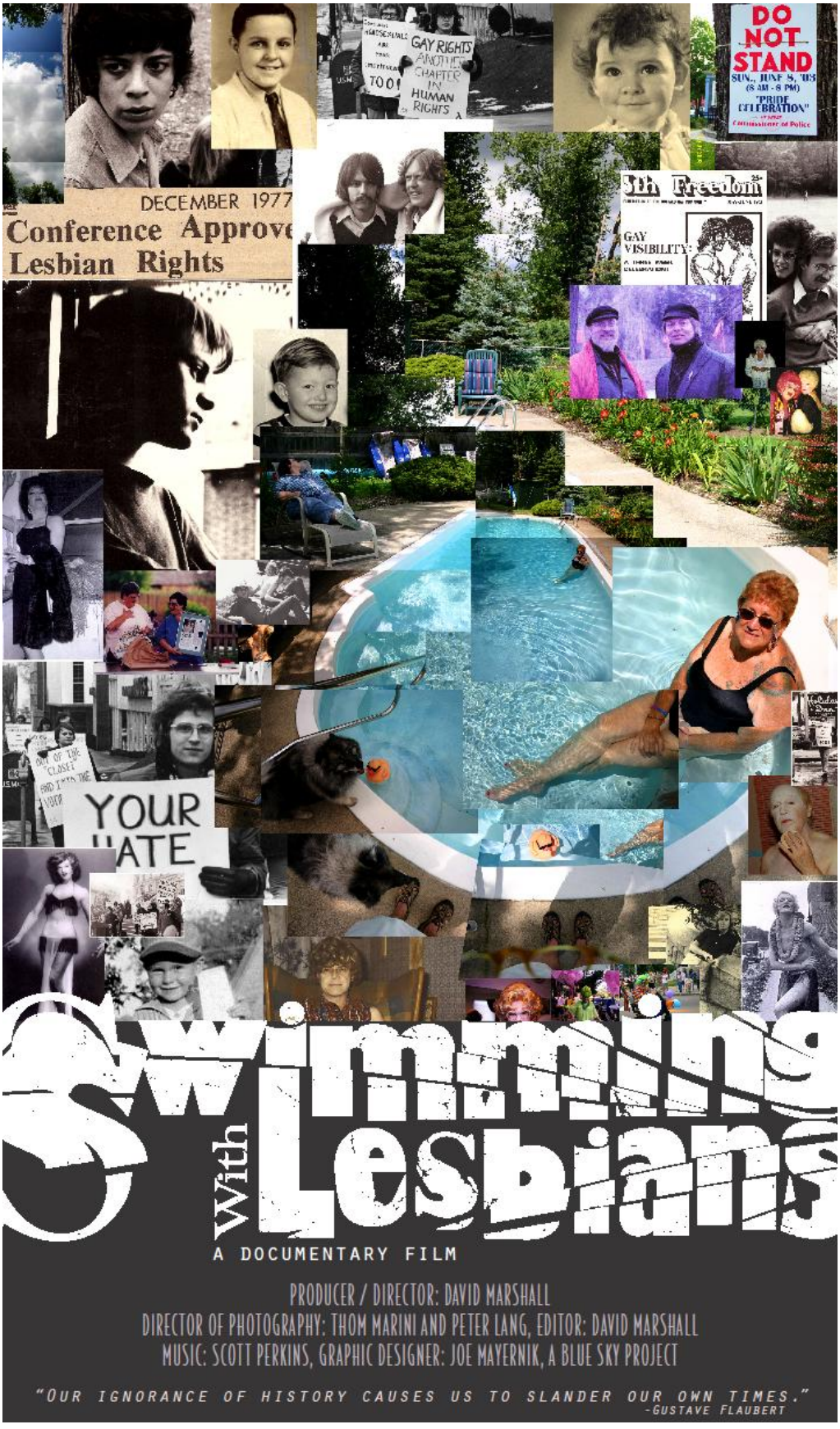
Poster for Planned Parenthood exhibit
Empowered Bodies, Roe at 35
Photo by K.C. Kratt 2007
Tattoo by Lamar Van Dyke

Rose at age 12, 2009. One of our
Beloved Keeshond rescue dogs.
Photo by Mel Mune

Rose is 14 years old, surviving Cushings Disease and arthritis.

Sheila at Madeline's 70th Birthday Party, July, 2010

Taken in our back yard. Sheila is not fond of pictures of herself but I think she is very pretty and this is a good photo. She is 67.


DO NOT STAND
GAY RIGHTS ANOTHER CHAPTER IN HUMAN RIGHTS
DECEMBER 1977
Conference Approve
Lesbian Rights
5th Freedom
GAY VISIBILITY
YOUR HATE
Swimming With Lesbians
A DOCUMENTARY FILM
PRODUCER / DIRECTOR: DAVID MARSHALL
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: THOM MARINI AND PETER LANG, EDITOR: DAVID MARSHALL
MUSIC: SCOTT PERKINS, GRAPHIC DESIGNER: JOE MAYERNIK, A BLUE SKY PROJECT
"OUR IGNORANCE OF HISTORY CAUSES US TO SLANDER OUR OWN TIMES."
-GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

I met Suzanne in Italian class at the University of Buffalo in 1959. We called each other Signorina. She had the most beautiful hands I had ever seen. She moved away. I called her long distance a few times. Every time I called she said she was on her way to bed with some man waiting for her. I don't know if that was true but she hurried off the phone. She wanted no association with her short-lived lesbian past.

For Suzanne
Madeline Davis, c.1969

We would have been lovers
if you had stayed
if you hadn't been afraid;
if I had known a little more.

There was no laugh on earth like yours
Strange bells, warm honey, summer evening.
Frantic phone calls in the middle
of the night
made me grateful you were scared
of spiders.
I killed for you, you thought.
(Secretly I held them by their legs
and dropped them out the window
into bushes.)

But I would have-
I would have battled all your dragons
with my dedicated sword
and brought their smoking heads
and laid them at your feet.

Instead, I wrote you melodies
and sang you little arias
and shivered as your lovely fingers
curved around my arm.

We would have been lovers
if you had stayed.
Tempestuous, passionate,
ultimately tuned.
Each others' instruments,
Each other's endless song.

We would have been lovers

if you had stayed,
if I hadn’t been
afraid.

In May of 1971 gay and lesbian activists from Buffalo traveled to Albany, NY to meet other activists from across the state and participate in the first statewide gay rights march. It was a demonstration of political solidarity not seen since the Stonewall Riots in NY city in 1969. The excitement of that time inspired the lyrics to this anthem. This song was also used as the them music for the film, Swimming With Lesbians. It was also published in The Advocat, 1973.

STONEWALL NATION (song lyric)
Madeline Davis, c.1971

I don't want to see my brothers kicked into the dust no more
Their dreams all turned to rust, no more
No more….no more.

I don't want to see my sisters having to give in no more
Their loving called a sin, no more
No more….no more.

And the Stonewall Nation's gonna have its liberation
Wait and see; just wait and see
For together we can rise above it
We're gonna be ourselves and love it.
Stonewall Nation is gonna be free.

Come on brothers march along; we're all gonna sing our song
Right now, right now

And sisters take me by the hand; we're gonna build a promised land
Right now, right now.

And the Stonewall Nation's gonna lave its liberation
Wait and see; just wait and see
You can take your tolerance and stow it
We're gonna be ourselves and show it
Stonewall Nation is gonna be free.

Allen came to visit. Terry and I were at a part in 1973 .We were shocked when he walked in the door. How did he find us? He brought opium from California and gave it to us. The whole incident made me remember how much I loved him..

This Is Not Our Anniversary
Madeline Davis, c.1973

This is not our anniversary
I have not been there since '70
Nor you here in four years.
The opium you left was used one night with friends.
Terry ate two boxes of Lorna Doones
And fell asleep.
I smiled a lot
And fell asleep.
We missed you when you went.

This is not our anniversary.
I play flute concertos
And think of you.
Remember how awful it was to be married?
Remember how we laughed?

This is not our anniversary.

My life is full of women now,
Beautiful, smooth, soft, flower women
Tough, strong, knowing, smiling, tender women.
Women I shall always love
Women for whom I was born and made
And melt with perfectly.

This is not our anniversary.

You were the end of an era
The close of a season
The final chord
The last of the wine
And I loved it when you said
I did beautiful things to the sunshine.
But this is not our anniversary.

This is not our anniversary
And you are not

You are not
You
    My greatest betrayal.

For the butch women who gave me my life. It recalls their lives, their struggles and the heroism they didn't even know they evinced. They were kind to me and showed great caring. I owe them my appreciation for lesbian community and culture and for inspiring the attraction I have always had for butch women.

BOOTS OF LEATHER (Song Lyric)
Madeline Davis, c.1974

Chorus:
For she walks in boots of leather
And in slippers made of gold.
She will be a child forever
And forever she'll be old.
She's the heroine of legends.
She's the eagle and the dove.
She's the daughter of the moon.
She's my sister and my love.

She was born in winter's fury
With the wind about her ears.
She was raised on strife and sadness
And the city-dweller's fears.
She was nursed on wine and bloodshed
And she cut her teeth on steel.
And she wept alone in darkness
For the pain she was to feel.

Chorus:

Many nights will fill a cavern.
Many days will calm the seas.
Many years will dull the longing
And erode the memories.
Evermore the granite forests
Make a place for her to dwell.
And the streets of sleepy dreaming
Make a story she can tell.

Chorus:

This was actually written for a young couple as they were starting out after their wedding. But it has seemed, over the years, to reflect all those enterprises that seem to be undertaken against odds.

THE DOOR IS STANDING OPEN

Madeline Davis, c.1974

Chorus:

Oh the door is standing open and the road is rough and winding
Come and take my hand; see what has begun.
We are children on our journey. We must find the strength together.
Take my hand and we shall walk into the sun.

All our lives are made of changes; some for joy and some for sorrow,
Some for body, some for Spirit, some for mind.
Like the ever-changing waters, like the winds and like the seasons
We are part of what we seek and what we find.

Chorus:

Something greater than the morning will be with us in the darkness
We shall know it through our laughter and our tears.
With a never ending wonder we'll discover in each other
That the peace of love flows gently through our years.

Chorus:

I could not have loved anyone more. This was a song written for Dassan, the Samoyed huskey that was owned by Bobbie Bailey when we were together. He was the sweetest dog and I missed him terribly when we broke up. Animals are the hardest to leave; more than people.

FIRST DOG

Madeline Davis, c.1975

You came to us in April-
Small sweet furry accident
grey from weeks of sleeping
in a pen of shredded newsprint.
I didn't really want you –
too expensive, time consuming;
wouldn't the cats be outraged?
But you settled in
chewing magazines and table legs
pouncing and wagging and grinning
your perpetual hereditary smile.
And so we've lived our days with you
this first year, this small time
and you have learned your lessons well,
winning ribbons and diplomas
for our silly, needful egos,
knowing all the while that bones are best.
And you have lived your days with us,
through vitamins and reprimands.
Learning all the proper actions,
meeting all our expectations,
asking hardly anything at all:
food and water in the morning
racing through the leaves in autumn
burrowing in snowdrifts
and on summer days
a seaweed smelling swim.
I can't remember now
The way it was before you came.
Perhaps the car was somewhat cleaner,
and walks a bit less fun.
But there is really no before
and after never is reality.
We live together now, and now
I fill your dish, and write you poetry,
And watch you sleep
and dream

of praise.

When Elizabeth went to Alaska for the Spring, Summer and part of the fall of 1976 I envisioned the life she was going to lead. I know I romanticized her time there, not considering the hard work she was going to do. But the visions of mountains and forests and getting away from civilization seemed to be such a wonderful relief.

OCEAN-EYED LADY (song lyric)
Madeline Davis, c.1976

Ocean-eyed lady the north winds are calling you
back to the land of the hemlock and pine.
Rainforest hillsides, the clean air of daybreak
ice-flowing rivers like cool running wine.

Take the dreams we have shared
and the love we have known
Let them warm you my lady
until you are home.

You have run through my dreams in the mist-morning light
Send your voice on the music that haunts me at night.
You have touched me with breezes blown fresh from the sea.
My ocean-eyed lady, come softly to me

Bind the tears from our eyes,
with the hope from our breasts
And weave them my lady
so soon we may rest.

Instrumental interlude

Fly away on the wind
Ride away on the foam
While I wait here my lady
until you are home.

Ocean-eyed lady your smile is the summer sun
melting the chill of this cold winter grey.
Your spirit the promise of springtime awakening
rush of the rivers, the dawning of day

Hear my voice in the wood.
Hear my song on the sea.
My ocean-eyed lady
Return, love, to me.

There is something about the importance of valuing those things that are clearly temporary. Things that live only for a season. And even relationships that you know can't last have their own beauty.

BUTTERFLIES AND ROSES (song lyric)
Madeline Davis, c. 1980

In the empty morning light, after you have slipped away
With the place beside me turning cold, in the coming of the day.

I must remember that the wonder is nothing less because you go.
And the joy of having touched was a precious thing to know.

Chorus:
And you are butterflies and roses
All the things that visit
For a time before they run.

And you are a single perfect snowflake
A starry night suspended
Turned to shadows with the dawn.

All the nights that give us comfort turn to days and disappear
Still the mem'ry of them warms my dreams when this love cannot be near.

And I remember that the wonder of your hands and heart were real
And the joy of having touched you, a sweet pain I'll always feel.

Chorus:

All the butterflies and roses, disappear in winter's snow
With the joy of having loved you, just before you had to go
With the butterflies and roses.

This song was written to honor the men and women who have died of AIDS. In 1983 Jack Cormack who knew he was dying of AIDS called to ask me to sing at his funeral. He was only the first. I sang this and Amazing Grace so many times in the 1980s that even now, when I hear them, they plunge me into sadness and memory. This song was recently adopted and sung by the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

ANOTHER ONE DOWN (Song Lyric)
Madeline Davis, c. 1981

Chorus:
And there's another one down
Another one gone to sleep
A son or a daughter is led to the slaughter
And rocks in an endless night's peace.

It's a long, hard march through the deserts of life to the edges of time
It takes a good pair of shoes and a strong hand to hold
And an eye that will never go blind
And a few of us make it, and a lot of us fall down behind.

Chorus:

It's a strange, wild wind that will blow us along; that will lead us astray
And if we travel alone it will lead us from home and leave us in dust where we lay
But if one hand will follow and one hand will lead,
Then some of us might find the way.

Chorus:

I have had a number of tempestuous relationships. Some long; some short. I assumed that most of them would not last and I was right. But they were exhilarating and I came to appreciate the thrill of a touch of the insanity of romance that is never quite stable.

YOU'RE A CIRCUS (song lyric)
Madeline Davis, c.1984

Chorus:
You're a circus; you're a ferris wheel
You're a high speed roller coaster ridin' me around
You're a circus; you're a carnival
And when I'm with you my feet don't touch the ground
'Cause you're a circus

You're a hot summer day that goes steamin' through my heart
You're lemonade that cools my throat and makes the chillin' start
You're a big top, a little top, a wild ferocious cat
And you whirl through my life like a tumblin' acrobat
'Cause you're a circus…

Chorus:

You're a tight-rope walker suspended on a wire
Sending thrills along my nerves; you're a swallower of fire
You're a crazy room of mirrors where I always lose my way
You're a lion, you're a tamer, you're the price I have to pay
'Cause you're a circus.

Chorus:

It is said that gay people have a past but not a history. As we gather together the history of our people. we are aware that we do not have a body of legends; of heroes like other cultures. So I created a butch, lesbian cowgirl whose character would fulfill my need for an historical romance. With the pronouns changed this was adapted by the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus.

THE BANDIT (Song Lyric)
Madeline Davis, c.1985

Down the road she traveled on a dark and dusky evening
While her shadow followed, purple, through the narrow winding vale.
She was dressed in leather breeches and her hair was short and slickered
And she looked like any outlaw on the trail.

I had heard of her in stories, and in songs the men were singing
When the children weren't allowed to listen in.
They said she was a bandit and she lived by robbing bankers,
But most of all they said that her existence was a sin.

But I dreamed, of the gentling of her hands,
And I dreamed, of the firelight in her eyes,
That I'd ride along beside her and go anywhere she'd take me
And I'd live she life she loved until I died.

I was walking by the stream that runs through my daddy's homestead
When I saw a dark and lonely figure riding through the trees.
She said, "Lady don't be frightened, for I have not come to harm you,
But my horse and I are thirsty; may we share your water, please?"

Her voice was low and calming and she smiled as she dismounted
And she quenched their thirst with water as she told me where she'd been.
In my life I knew I'd never had the feeling that was growing
And the sweet touch of her fingers told my heart this was no sin.

And I knew, by the gentling of her hands,
And I knew, by the firelight in her eyes,
That I'd ride along beside her and go anywhere she'd take me
And I'd live the life she loved until I died.

I cried, "Please to take me with you, for I know now that I love you".
She said, "Darlin' there's a danger if you ride with me tonight.
I'm an insult to the rich folk, taking money, loving women"
But I paid no heed to warning and we rode in the dusky light.

Well the town called out a posse, saying that I had been kidnapped
And before the morning sun they found us sleeping 'neath the sky.

They shot her without warning; in my arms she lay there bleeding
Whispering, “Lady know I love you”… in the breath before she died.

And I swear, by the gentling of her hands,
And I swear, by the firelight in her eyes,
That I’ll ride along without her, and go where her spirit leads me
And I’ll live the life she loved…. until I die.

This guided meditation was written in the very early spring for Spiderwoman Coven. It is the story of the long winter sleep; the time for regeneration and the refreshment felt after rest. My friend Annie repeated my story to me while I was in a coma in the hospital ICU.

THE BEAR – A GUIDED MEDITATION

Madeline Davis, c.1987

Winter is coming to the forest. The is crisp and a light wind begins to blow. You feel the wind on your face; in your hair, and know that the season is changing. Leaves have turned red and gold. Many have fallen. The leaves crunch under your feet. You come to a tree and sit amid the leaves resting your back against the trunk. In front of you a small rise covered with frail trees and fallen leaves.. You look toward the rise and see an opening. It is a cave. You watch the opening as the wind rustles the leave. You close your eyes. This is a place of calm. Here you are safe.

You notice that your belly feels full. You have eaten much over these last days and you are satisfied. You feel big and strong and round. Your skin begins to prickle and you touch your arms. A strange sensation. Soft fur is growing on your arms. You are concerned but you continue to sit, waiting. Fur grows on your neck and legs and body. It is strange but not alarming.

Your clothes are no longer needed and they begin to disappear, piece by piece. Your ears grow round. Your palms grow large; your fingers become shorter and the nails lengthen and curve. You are becoming The Bear and the feeling is large and soft.

You are tired. Your bones ache and your mind has been too busy. You wish to rest. You have been awake for three seasons and have traveled far. You need sleep. You need healing. And now you have come home to the place where you will settle for your winter quietude. This is a place of calm. You can settle undisturbed.

You creep into the cave opening. It is warm here; closed off from the wind. You turn back to the opening and push twigs and branches to cover the breach. Only a small amount of light filters into the cave. You crawl through soft leaves and moss to the back of the cave and scratch them into a pile. You lie down and roll in the softness to make a space that will fit your large, tired body. You yawn and curl up with knees to your belly and paws over your face. You sleep, soft, cozy. No one will disturb your rest. This is a place of calm. Here you are safe.
The winter will happen outside the cave but you will sleep. Your heart will slow and you will sleep. You will sleep. Days go by. Weeks go by. Weeks and months go by. The world is covered with snow. The wind blows. But you rest in the warmth and darkness. You dream of the coming of spring.

(The music plays quietly.)

One day, the wind quiets. The snow has ceased to fall and the sun begins to warm the earth. The forest is wet with melting ice. The creeks run with new water. Small green shoots appear in patches of snow. Trout lilies and Trillium follow, peeking through wet leaves. In your cave you stir.

There are new sounds. Song sparrows and red-winged black birds disturb your sleep. You stretch and leaves fall aside. Smells are wafting into the cave. Sweet earth, skunk cabbage, early may apples. You are hungry. You crawl to the cave opening and push aside the twigs. Spring is

coming to your forest and your heart beats faster. You crawl out of the cave into a patch of sunlight. The sun is warm on your fur. It is drying the dampness. It is welcoming you back.

You have slept a season and you are renewed. It is time to return to yourself. You pad through the leaves to the tree and sit on the moss in the sunlight. You close your eyes and lift your face to warmth and the new smells of spring. You have rested and healed and you are ready, ready for change. The fur on your back and your belly begins to thin. The skin on your arms feels once again like flesh. Your nails grow shorter and your fingers lengthen. Your face is clear and your hair has returned to the texture you remember. Your clothes have come back to your body, like magic from the earth. You are once again yourself.

You rise; a little stiff but beginning to loosen, and you look back at the cave, remembering The Bear. Perhaps it was a dream. Perhaps it was not. You turn and walk through the forest into the balmy morning, the beginning of your day. You will remember The Bear. You will remember your winter rest. You will remember the time of tiredness and sleep and the energy of wakening. Perhaps someday The Bear will return. For now, it is spring and you are whole and well and ready for your life.

This is a piece of my own personal history evoking a picture of the woman I have been and the women I have been attracted to. It was published in "The Persistent Desire: a femme-butch reader" ed by Joan Nestle. Boston, Alyson Pub, 1992 p.331

OLD FEMME

Madeline Davis, c.1991

I know what I am
when I look at old pictures
long, wavy hair, eyeliner, mascara
demure and mysterious.
I know what I am
when I wander on my lunch hour
to sample new fragrances
and linger near lace lingerie.
I know what I am
when I paw through these letters
still warm with old passions
held firmly in wide rubber bands.
I know what I am
when the sight of white t-shirts
and the smell of Old Spice
can still make me shiver and smile.
I know what I am
in the dark when you fill me
your hands and your mouth
in the heat of the heart of my center
I know what I am.

Wendy asked me for years to write her a song. I hadn't been writing for a long time. Finally I was struck by the thought that we, like Ruth and Naomi, would be together forever. This is also a wedding song that I sang at Wendy's sister Amy's wedding.

WHEREVER YOU GO (song lyric)
Madeline Davis, c.2002

Chorus:
Wherever you go I will go
Wherever you live, I will live with you
Your people will be my family
And your spirit will dwell in my soul
For wherever you go I will go.

Come walk with me in Springtime
Through early morning dew
We shall discover the world together
And love that's always new.

Come run with me through Summer sun
Through blooming meadowsweet
Like butterflies our hearts will rise
And love will be complete

Chorus:

Come dance with me in autumn wind
Through leaves of red and gold
The smoky scent of Summer's end
When love grows full and bold.

Come lie with me in Winter's chill
I'll hold you against the storm
This love will be our coverlet
And ever keep us warm.

Chorus:

My mother continuously tried to remind me of things that happened to her as a child. I kept telling her that I would not recall things that happened before I was born. She reassured me that some day I would. I was both a silly thought and perhaps a scary one.

MEMORY

Madeline Davis, c.2004

I don't remember things
The way they really were.
The difference between fact and truth.
My mother remembered
finding the dog
in the back yard, tired and wet,
giving him food and water
and getting closer
putting him on a leash
and leading him into the house
for a bath and a meal.
She never lived in that house.
That was never her dog.
It was my house, and my dog.
But she had no stories of her own.
So she took mine.
And in her mind
it was her memory.
She said some day I would
remember her childhood.
I said I hadn't been born yet.
She said, "Never mind.
Some day you will remember."
As I grow older
I suspect, and fear
she may be right.